A WIFE'S STORY,

AND

OTHER TALES.

VOL. I.

A WIFE'S STORY,

AND

OTHER TALES.

BODLEIAN BIBLIOTHECA

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"CASTE," "SAFELY MARRIED,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE tales contained in these volumes are reprinted from "Household Words," "All the Year Round," "Blackwood's Magazine," "The Cornhill Magazine," and "Chambers's Journal," by the kind permission of the proprietors of those publications.

It is believed that the three following letters from the late Mr. Charles Dickens —letters hitherto unpublished—will not only lend an interest beyond their own to the two tales to which they refer—"A Wife's Story," and "An Experience,"—but that they are, in themselves, noteworthy as characteristic evidences of the great

novelist's generous and helpful sympathy with younger writers.

It should be added that the letters are here printed by permission of Mr. Dickens's executors.

LETTER I.

"3, Albion Villas,
"Folkestone, Kent.
"Tuesday, Seventeenth July, 1855.

"DEAR MADAM,

"Your manuscript, entitled 'A Wife's Story,' has come under my own perusal within these last three or four days. I recognise in it such great merit and unusual promise, and I think it displays so much power and knowledge of the human heart, that I feel a strong interest in you as its writer.

"I have begged the gentleman who is in my confidence as to the transaction of the business of 'Household Words' to return the MS. to you by the post which (as I hope) will convey this note to you. My object is this: I particularly

entreat you to consider the catastrophe. You write to be read, of course. The close of the story is unnecessarily painful—will throw off numbers of persons who would otherwise read it, and who (as it stands) will be deterred, by hearsay, from so doing, and is so tremendous a piece of severity, that it will defeat your own purpose. All my knowledge and experience, such as they are, lead me straight to the recommendation that you will do well to spare the life of the husband and one of the children. Let her suppose the former dead, from seeing him brought in wounded and insensible—lose nothing of the progress of her mental suffering, afterwards, when that doctor is in attendance upon her;—but bring her round at last to the blessed surprise that her husband is still living, and that a repentance which can be worked out *in the way of atonement for the misery she has occasioned to the man whom she so ill-repaid for his love and made so miserable*, lies before her. So you will soften the reader whom you now, as it were, harden; and so you will bring tears from many eyes which can only have their spring in affectionately and gently touched hearts. I am

perfectly certain that with this change all the previous part of your tale will tell for twenty times as much as it can in its present condition. And it is because I believe you have a great fame before you, if you do justice to the remarkable ability you possess, that I venture to offer you this advice in what I suppose to be the beginning of your career.

"I observe some parts of the story which would be strengthened, even in their psychological interest, by condensation here and there. If you will leave that to me, I will perform the task as conscientiously as if it were my own. But the suggestion I offer for your acceptance no one but yourself can act upon.

"Let me conclude this hasty note with the plain assurance that I have never been so much surprised and struck by any manuscript I have read, as I have been by yours.

"Your faithful Servant,

"CHARLES DICKENS."

LETTER II.

"3, Albion Villas, Folkestone.
"Twenty-first July, 1855.

"Dear Madam,

"I did not enter, in detail, on the spirit of the alteration I propose in your story, because I thought it right that you should think out that for yourself, if you applied yourself to the change. I can now assure you that you describe it exactly as I had conceived it; and if I had wanted anything to confirm me in my conviction of its being right, our both seeing it so precisely from the same point of view would be ample assurance to me.

"I would leave her new and altered life to be inferred. It does not appear to me either necessary or practicable (within such limits) to do more with that.

"Do not be uneasy if you find the alteration demanding time. I shall quite understand that, and my interest will keep. *When* you finish the story, send it to Mr. ———. Besides being in daily communication with him, I am at the office

once a week; and I will go over it in print, before the proof is sent to you.

"Very faithfully yours,

"CHARLES DICKENS."

LETTER III.

"26, Wellington Street, Strand,
"London, W.C.
"Thursday, Twenty-second July, 1869.

"DEAR MISS ——,

"Mr. —— has retired from here (for rest and to recover his health), and my son, who occupies his place, brought me, this morning, a story* in MS., with a request that I would read it. I read it with extraordinary interest, and was greatly surprised by its uncommon merit. On asking whence it came, I found that it came from you.

"You need not be told, after this, that I accept it with more than readiness. If you will allow me, I will go over it with great care, and very slightly touch it here and there. I think

* "An Experience."

it will require to be divided into three portions. You shall have the proofs, and I will publish it immediately. I think so very highly of it, that I will have special attention called to it in a separate advertisement. I congratulate you most sincerely and heartily on having done a very special thing. It will always stand apart in my mind from any other story I ever read. I write with its impression newly and strongly upon me, and feel absolutely sure that I am not mistaken.

"Believe me,

"Faithfully yours,

"CHARLES DICKENS."

A WIFE'S STORY.

A WIFE'S STORY.

CHAPTER I.

WE stood on the deck together—I and my husband,—I, shrouded in warm wrappings, with folded arms, leaning against him. How strong he was! How firm he stood! How delightful it was to me to lean there so!

It was late, and it was a wild night; a strong wind blowing, and our ship bounding on over high-swelling waves. It should have been moonlight—the moon was at the full—but only now and then a wind-rent in the clouds let her pale light through.

We did not talk, the wild wind would

have blown our words away, and my heart and soul were very full. Leaning there, I thought I had found life-long peace, a refuge from all trouble and distress. What a beautiful future I pictured!

We were both young: I some five years the younger: a mere girl in age and in appearance, yet all too old at heart. Measuring life by the bitterness of gained experience, by its pain, and not by the number of its days and years, I was no longer young. My life had been a long struggle; a series of conflicts, in which I always came off heart-wounded, sometimes hand-disabled, never subdued. I had been ever at war with circumstance. There was a strange and secret strength somewhere within me, that would not be crushed out: that would not let me yield. But though too strong to submit myself a willing slave to any imposed yoke, my nature was not strong enough, I was not wise enough, to gather all powers of soul and heart and mind together, into conscious

possession, and then yield meekly, quietly, and entirely to the recognition of the controlling power of a higher will. So I had fought on as blindly, as vehemently, doing battle boldly for real and unreal rights, resenting deeply both real and supposed injuries.

No mere woman can live long so—at war with all around; I had grown heart-sick, and utterly weary; soon I should have lain down and given in. But a great change had come to me. While I had been struggling and striving in a night of darkness, in which the things after which my ambition prompted me to reach always eluded my eager hands,—God laid in my path, at my very feet, a good gift.

I was a governess when my husband began to woo me. I was his equal by birth, but what did that serve me? He was far above me in station, now; he was handsome, and he was much courted and admired. The daughters of the family with whom I

lived would have been proud to win him; he turned from them with his simple, frank, not unchivalrous indifference, and bent the power of his nature to loving me! I was rather small, generally very quiet in manner, not beautiful, and not plain. I believe I had a certain dignity of my own, which had been useful to me in my unprotected state. I felt that when I chose I could compel respect, and I gloried in that power, though it made me more feared than loved.

I do not know what it could have been in me that served to draw my husband's notice upon me, and then to win me his love. I think—for his was a most faithful heart—that he must have regarded me, first, for the sake of some real or imagined likeness to my brother, my dead brother, who had been his friend. And yet it was hardly *me* he loved; of my real nature, its force, its aspirations, its vehement unrest, he knew nothing. He loved me as he saw me, look-

ing through some medium of his own interposing.

Of course he was my first lover. Who else would have turned from our three household Graces,—the grown-up daughters of the family—brilliant, accomplished, dowered, and, apparently, sweet-tempered, as they were, to me—poor, plain, and proud, as I was considered? So, of course, he was my first lover! If I loved him aright I could not tell,—if I ever loved him as a wife should love, I do not even now know. I felt it infinitely sweet and strange to be beloved—to be the object of such protecting tenderness as his. I asked no questions,—when I could once believe in his love, I gave myself up, abandoned my whole being utterly, to the great, new joy. There was nothing to distract my mind, nothing to divide my affection with him, and I had very large capacity of loving. His loving me was, for me, a sufficient proof of his goodness, of his disinterestedness, and of his great-heart-

edness. I was satisfied, and Harold could not long doubt that I loved him, and I am sure he never suspected me of accepting him for any other reason. He could see my eyes well over with delight, my cheek flush, and my hands tremble, when he gave me any new proof of the love of which I hungered and yet half-dreaded, to be convinced.

I remember, how well! the first thing that excited my mistress's (so I called her in my proud humility) suspicion of the truth, and that first stirred up a joyful, thrilling hope in my poor heart. Mr. Warden came to the house one morning; it was earlier than he had ever called before, and I was in the large school-room, giving a music-lesson to the youngest girl; the three elder sisters were in the room that day, busily occupied with various works of idleness, and still in morning-costume, so that an authoritative knock at the hall-door caused some alarm and stir. But I went on giving my lesson, wearily endeavouring to do the work of both teacher

and pupil. The door opened, and some one entered, before the young ladies had effected their escape to their dressing-rooms. There was a movement and flutter, but I did not look round, or imagine that it in any way concerned me.

"Mr. Warden was particularly anxious to see our school-room, and to discover in what praiseworthy manner you young ladies were occupied here; so I have brought him in to take you by surprise," I heard my mistress say in her most gracious voice.

Then I just glanced round, for I always felt a sort of interest in Mr. Warden, for the sake of a remembered and happier lang-syne, though I did not expect him in any way to reciprocate it. He was standing at the far end of the room, surrounded by the four ladies; in his hand he held a most glorious bouquet of hot-house roses, which they were all admiring; he did not hold them carelessly and indifferently, and as if half-ashamed of carrying them, as men so often hold

flowers; but carefully, and tenderly, and half-proudly. I saw this at a glance, and meeting his eyes, bowed slightly, and turned back again to the music-book and my pupil's heedless fingers, expecting that in a moment the ladies, the visitors, and his roses would have vanished from my domain. But the fragrance of those flowers reached me, it grew more and more deliciously strong;—they must be near.

I turned my head very, very slightly, and became conscious that some one stood behind me—that the precious flowers almost touched my cheek.

"How very sweet they are," I ventured to say, the flowers drawing the words from me; for their perfume seemed to have entered my heart.

"Are you not tired, Annie? Your pupil does not seem very attentive—isn't it wearisome work?" Mr. Warden asked.

He was bending down to me, flowers in hand. Somehow I could not answer—some-

thing in tone or words touched me like remembered music, and I longed to weep.

He had heard of me as Annie all his life, and so forgot to call me anything else, even now, when I was a poor governess, and he —but I am sure he never thought of that. He found me again, after having lost sight of me for years; he found me unhappy, and took me into his heart.

I had not yet voice to speak when Mrs. Stone bustled up.

"Has not Amelia been attentive this morning, Miss Aston?" she asked, with a great appearance of concern.

"She has not been less so than usual, ma'am," I answered coldly.

"You should complain to me, my dear, when you find her troublesome; she is rather a giddy child, I know. Come now, Amelia, and have your bonnet put on; a walk will do both you and Miss Aston good."

So saying, the lady went to the door with the child, thinking that I followed her.

"A moment!" Harold interposed, as I was rising to do so.

I sat down again in my chair by the piano, bending my eyes on the pencil-case my fingers were playing with, and wondering vaguely what he could be going to say.

"I brought these for you," Mr. Warden began hurriedly, holding out the roses. "You said the other day how fond you were of flowers. I came down from London last night, and brought these from Covent Garden. May I leave them with you?"

I did not hold out my hand, so he laid them on my lap; they looked wondrous beautiful on my black dress.

Harold glanced round the room. We were alone; the young ladies had disappeared to dress, meaning that Mr. Warden should escort them for a walk that bright Winter's morning.

"I want to know," he began, confusedly, "are you happy here? How do they treat

you? Do not be proud with me, remember——"

I raised my eyes, full of tears, gratefully to him. He should see that at least I was not proud to him, to anyone who treated me kindly.

"Mr. Warden!" Mrs. Stone called from the passage, "I know you are a connoisseur in plants. I want to show you something rare in my conservatory. Oh, here you are! I beg your pardon for leaving you; I thought the girls had taken you into the drawing-room. This way, if you please; you must bend your tall head a little, I fear."

I was alone; I sat as he had left me. There lay the flowers; I did not stir or touch them; I only bent down over them, their fragrance filling my soul, and perhaps a tear or two falling on their petals. That fragrance must have been a kind of intoxication, such wildly beautiful thoughts stole in with it.

It was Winter; but this precious gift over which I bent, carried me away to some heavenly garden of perpetual rose-rich Summer. I gazed at my real roses—soft pink, rich crimson, snow-white, bright golden; they shut out the great bare room, the gaunt bare boughs swinging before the windows; they kept out all sense of cold and emptiness, and filled my heart with warmth and sweetness.

I do not know how long I dreamed. My reverie was broken into roughly. Mrs. Stone entered with a stormy rustling of her handsome dress, that told of some excitement.

"Oh!" she began, looking sharply at me, "Mr. Warden forgot his roses here, I suppose. I wondered where he had left them. He is gone out with the young ladies. Amelia is with her sisters, so you can go into the garden, if you please. You need not have touched those flowers, Miss Aston. Put them in water in the drawing-room, if

you please. No doubt they were brought for Julia; but Mr. Warden is rather shy, and perhaps did not like to offer them."

The lady approached, and looked more closely at my flowers.

"He must have given several guineas for that bouquet at this season," she continued; "very extravagant! but, however, he is a young man of large fortune, and, as a bachelor, can afford such extravagances. His father, I understand, was among the most wealthy of our merchant princes—by the way, how does it happen you know him so intimately?"

"He was a friend of ours—of my brother's, when I was a child."

"Indeed! Then of course you know all about the family. Has he any near relatives living?"

"I believe not," I answered.

I had risen, and I stood leaning against the piano, my flowers gathered up heedfully

in my folded arms. I half guessed what Mrs. Stone would say next, and stood on the defensive.

"I observed," the lady continued, "that Mr. Warden called you by your Christian name. That was all very well when you were a child, but I am sure, as a sensible young woman, you will see that now it is hardly becoming. There is a wide difference of station and position, you must remember. For a governess to be treated with such an appearance of familiarity by a handsome young man of fortune, is not 'the thing.' You hear me, Miss Aston? Do not crush those flowers!"

I had gathered them rather closely to my bosom—I held them more loosely as I answered—

"I do, madam."

"I am sure you will acknowledge that I am right. I will mention the matter to Mr. Warden, if you choose—he appears to be rather an unsophisticated young man, and

perhaps does not know much of the ways of the world."

"I think Mr. Warden will act according to his ideas of right, and not according to what any one may tell him of the ways of the world, Mrs. Stone."

"That scornful look and tone is most unbecoming, Miss Aston. I have told you before, that if you cannot better control your temper, and treat me with more respect, I shall not be able to keep you, sorry as I should be to be forced to dismiss you. You know how much you have suffered already from the evil, but natural, interpretations put upon your frequent changes of situation. I wonder you are not more guarded. You cannot, I am sure, complain to Mr. Warden, or to any one else, that you have experienced anything but kindness here."

"I shall not complain—certainly not to Mr. Warden!" I interrupted.

"That is right; for once your pride is

proper and becoming. I need not detain you any longer. I have done, I only wanted to warn you; I am sure you understand me. Take those flowers and put them in water as I requested; they are beginning to droop. I am sure Julia will be pleased. I do not think Mr. Warden very clever, but he is a fine young man, very steady and very good-tempered, and Julia is ambitious and will spur him on, so they will suit well."

"Possibly!" I answered; "but about the flowers, you are mistaken, ma'am, they are mine; Mr. Warden laid them where you saw them—I had not touched them when you came in." I did not stay to see the effect of my words, but went up to my own room. There I put my treasures lovingly in water, and then sat by them thinking, and my heart softened as it had not done for many a day. I felt so grateful to Harold! Any way, it was so kind, so thoughtful to bring such lovely flowers for me! In my heart I was always most deeply grateful to him; but I

do not remember that I ever thought of being so to Heaven, for any of my happiness, and so my very gratitude grew to be a pain to me and a bane to him.

But I must not anticipate, though you know mine to be a sad story.

It was not so very long after my receipt of that first, most precious gift (I have the dust of those flowers now!), that Harold asked me to be his wife.

It was on one early Spring evening, when I had stolen half an hour's freedom from my slavery, and gone alone into the garden. At least, it should have been Spring by the calendar, but it was a wintry evening, bleak, black, damp, and cold—a very dismal and dreary evening, and so I loved to linger out in its ghastly, chill twilight. I believe I was always happier in what other people called most miserable weather. It seemed as if I relished throwing my defiance in Nature's face, and yet I loved her with no half love-liking. Just then my proud,

exulting heart joyed in proving its happiness, its little dependence on aught external.

I had, not paced, but rushed, up and down the broad gravel-walk, beyond the chance of surveillance from the house, till I was weary; then I stood leaning against a great tree, and the solemn desolateness of the time and the scene stole icily to my heart, and I folded my arms, and gave way to a sombre, doubting, almost despairing, train of thought.

I loved the old tree I leaned against, though it grew in an enemy's soil. My heart had throbbed against it many a time —not with joy, but with grief, scorn, or impotent rage. And many a time my bitter, burning tears had fallen upon the turf above its roots. No one else ever stood there, leaning so, and I had grown to fancy the tree endowed with some power of sympathy, and that it bent down regardfully to me, and swept its branches lovingly over my face, and whispered consolingly in my

ear. But my friend was mute and still that night, with neither touch nor tone for me. The evening was sullenly quiet, and there was no wind-born murmur among the bare boughs.

As I stood leaning there, hidden from the path, I heard a step, a firm, crushing step, coming down the gravel road. I knew whose step—at least my heart knew, for it beat high against the tree's rough bark, stirred for once by somewhat else than pride or pain. But it did not beat there long . . . I was soon found, though I stood quite still in my hiding-place. Harold reproved me tenderly, and yet authoritatively, for staying out in that raw, cheerless air. I answered, not proudly, as I should have done had any other spoken so, but meekly and sadly. Then we both forgot the weather as that beaming, handsome, honest face was bent down close to mine.

He loved plain-spoken truthfulness, and,

if I blushed and pressed my cold hands beneath my shawl tight down over my swelling heart, yet I frankly accepted the love he frankly offered, and I did not scruple to let him know that I took it very thankfully. Then I was drawn close to him. It was cold no longer—my heart was warm and full. I suppose we walked up and down a long time—I remember it grew dark—but the sky cleared, and some few stars looked down upon us.

Harold simply told Mrs. Stone of our engagement, that we should be married as soon as I could make it convenient, and he had made proper preparations for receiving his wife, and added that he trusted I should meet with kindness and consideration for the little while it might be necessary for me to remain under her roof. He spoke very courteously, but plainly and decidedly.

Mrs. Stone was surprised and mortified, and she could not quite well conceal it. She had not thought Mr. Warden's "in-

fatuation" had been so great. She had had vague schemes, too, for sending me away, and then securing him for one of her own daughters. She was silent a moment, and then said, in a hard, unmoved voice,

"Of course you are aware, Mr. Warden, that Miss Aston must fulfil her engagement with me—a prior engagement to that so hastily, and—to speak plainly—it seems to me, so unbecomingly, formed with you. She is here as a governess, and must continue here in the capacity for which she was hired, for three months from this time."

A flush and a frown came upon Harold's face, but I interposed.

"I shall be quite ready, Mrs. Stone," I answered, "to perform all my duties as usual, till the time for which I was engaged has expired. I do not think you can accuse me of having ever wilfully neglected duty; I do not know why I should do so now."

"Very well. This is, I believe, the last day of February——"

"The first of March, I think, ma'am—is it not?" I asked, turning to Harold.

"I think so," he answered, discontentedly.

"On the first of June, then, you leave my service," Mrs. Stone said. "Till that time," she added, "I shall of course expect that my daughter's education will be carried on without interruption."

I bowed assent. Harold took his leave, chafing sorely at Mrs. Stone's manner, and at having to leave me for so long a time to her tender mercies. I was not sorry to remain where I was; my present happiness was quite enough, and I should be glad to grow quietly acquainted with that ere there came any further change. I crept out of the room soon after Harold went away, and was alone with my joy till morning. It was well for me that I was love-strong, and proof against annoyance, for that house was no home or rest for me.

They even tried to come between me and

Harold's love, filling his ears with tales—some of them, alas ! too true—of my violent temper, my singularities, my excessive pride, and my utter unsuitableness for making any man's home happy. But they soon gave up this attempt. Harold looked through their assumed to their real motives with the clear vision of a simple, sincere nature, and treated me only the more tenderly and pityingly when we met. This was not very often, or for long at a time. We had no opportunity of gaining any real knowledge of each other. During those three months I had time for thinking over the impending change. I might have weighed and tried my love had I had a scale or table of weights to guide me. I had not. I knew that I sickened at the bare thought of anything intervening between me and Harold, and shutting out the glimpse of a glorious, free life, beyond my prison-walls, that he opened to me; and I did not question of what nature and kind should be the love between hus-

band and wife, or doubt whether we could make one another happy.

I had one relative, a maiden aunt, in but poor circumstances, of whom I knew very little. To her I went when that long three months had expired; from her house I was to be married in a fortnight's time.

In spite of my happiness, I had grown paler and thinner of late. I had been kept wearily and closely employed all day—or, rather, had kept myself so, choosing to do more, rather than less, than formerly,—and I had often sat up late into the night, busy with my needlework and my pleasant thoughts. Harold worried at my frail look. He was glad my aunt lived in the country; I promised to try and get rosy and strong there. As her house was small, and I knew she had a nervous horror of strangers, particularly of gentlemen, it had been arranged that Harold should not follow me to Ilton until the day before the wedding. The fortnight I was to be there he was to spend

in London, near which he had taken a house.

I found myself at my aunt's door at the close of a fine June afternoon.

Her door! I remember I smiled as I looked at it, it was such a tiny cottage door; how would Harold get in? I laughed to myself as I stood waiting a moment, before I knocked. Everything laughed too; the green leaves in the sunshine overhead, the bright, trimly-tended flowers in the narrow borders on each side of the narrow path. Then, how the buttercups laughed in the fields beyond!—such fields! so rich and dark-grounded, and so gloriously gold-spangled, bounded with hedges white with hawthorn. Field after field swelling and waving almost as far as I could see; only here and there a double row of tall elms or drooping limes, marking where some lane wound among them, or some little snowy patch of blossoming orchard varying their gorgeousness. And over the fields went

the slow-flitting, dark-blue shadows cast by the hovering clouds. Perhaps, somewhere near, out of sight, they were making hay already—some very delicious fragrance was floated to me by the soft wind. I laughed again, and then turned to knock at the little door.

It was opened; my aunt peeped out shyly. She was relieved to find me alone; but looked as if she half expected my handsome giant were lurking near.

"My dear, I am so glad to see you! God bless you! But I didn't expect you for an hour yet. Quite welcome, and everything is ready, though, but are you sure you are come alone? I heard some one laugh."

"I stood by myself, and laughed to myself, auntie. Yes, I am quite alone! I did not come by the coach; my luggage is coming by that, nevertheless."

"Well, you know, my dear, I shall be delighted to see your—Mr. Warden; but I am

glad he did not come here yet; and what shall we do with him, love, when he does come? You say he is so big, and my house is such a little one."

"If he cannot walk in to see me, he will crawl, perhaps."

My eyes were brimming over as I spoke, and my aunt looked into them. She nodded and smiled to herself, and then sighed.

"And now you must come up-stairs—not many stairs, you know—and I am sure you must want your tea."

My aunt bustled about, busy in taking off my bonnet and shawl. She kissed my forehead and smoothed my hair, and told me I had my mother's eyes; and sighed again, and prayed God keep me and guard me. Then she went down to make my tea, and I stood gazing out of the opened casement window. I can exactly recall how I felt then!—can see all I saw from that window—and remember just where each rose grew of those that clustered round and tried to peep into

the room. I picked one and put it in my hair, that I might have its fragrance near. Then I folded my arms softly on my bosom and looked steadfastly out, and such a peace came into my breast, and tears came softly down on to my hands. But then I only looked out—I did not look up.

"Annie! Annie!" my aunt called at the bottom of the stairs, and I went down. A little table was drawn up to the bowery window; and the tea smelt fragrant and delicious, and was most refreshing. Everything reminded me of the country—the bread, the butter, rich cream, and just-laid eggs. Aunt and I sat and chatted, and sipped our tea; and I felt very good and very patient with her gentle talk; and afterwards we went out of the little back-door, through the little back-garden, into the fields behind, where they really were making hay. "I hope it won't all be made before Harold comes," I said. And then my aunt asked me a thousand questions about this formidable Harold;

and from him we got somehow to the very important subject of my wardrobe, and discussed most thoroughly what I had and what I should want. My aunt had a kind neighbour, she said, who often offered her the use of his pretty pony-phaeton. If I could drive she would borrow it, as the best shops near were at Hard, seven miles off. I was not at all afraid of driving over those smooth, quiet roads; so when we went home, Mary, the little maid, was despatched, with my aunt's compliments, to this obliging neighbour, to beg the loan of his carriage for to-morrow. I stood on the door-step; I could not go in, it was such a balmy June evening; and it was so new and delicious to feel myself my own mistress—to expect no hasty summons to remind me of my bondage. I saw Mary trip away demurely through an orchard, then emerge and pursue the narrow track across a golden meadow, then disappear again behind some trees and shrubs, from among which I could see sun-

dry chimneys arise. She came back presently to say, with a half-smile, that Mr. Swayne returned his compliments, and the carriage was quite at her mistress's service; and so was he, if she would like him to drive her. So Mary had to trip back again with a message that Miss Aston had a niece staying with her who would drive her; she was obliged to Mr. Swayne.

"Mr. Swayne is such an odd man!" my aunt said, quite bashfully, I fancied.

"Nothing so very odd in being ready to oblige you, auntie?" I answered.

Aunt only shook her head, and sighed again,—the little placid sigh that seemed habitual to her, and that formerly had so often made me feel impatient with her.

Aunt Aston, I knew, kept early hours; so I soon bade her good night. Mindful of the economy practised in her little household, I first put out my candle, and then sat in the window, 'neath the starlight, for hours. To dream happily on the basis of things pro-

bable, was so new a delight, I could not easily be satisfied; and when at last my thoughts set themselves in musical order, I went to bed only to sing them over in my sleep.

But I remember I slept little that night; it seemed as if my soul under my eyelids kept up too much light. The red dawn woke me, and I did not close my eyes again; but while the first heavy dewiness was in air and on earth, I visited the hay-fields, buried myface in the hawthorn-hedges, withdrawing it disfigured by one or two unfriendly scratches, shook the petals of some late-blooming apple-trees in showers down upon my upturned face, and gathered my hands full of wild-roses. Their perfume now always calls to my mind the bowery lanes round Ilton. There was a very wild life beating at my heart that morning, in spite of the quiet step with which I paced about. I went in with dew-dabbled skirts, torn hands, and hair dishevelled from its usual scrupulous neatness. Aunt Aston

was down, and breakfast waiting; but I had a second toilette to make before I was presentable; and then I glanced ruefully at my hands when my aunt directed my attention to them. Harold would not like to see them so disfigured. I would wear gloves in future in my country rambles, I thought.

My aunt usually breakfasted at seven. That morning it was past eight when we sat down; and, before we had finished, our carriage was waiting for us at the door. I had what seemed to me a large sum of money in my possession—a whole year's salary untouched, and a little money saved from the earnings of former years besides. Yet saved is hardly the right word. My money, as soon as received, was always thrown into a drawer; I hated the sight of it—my wages, as I scornfully termed it. I felt nothing of the nobility or the worship of labour; I always resented, never gloried in, my state of servitude. My salary had, as Mrs. Stone reminded me, been hand-

some, and my expenses very few; I had worn mourning for years, and my plain black dresses had cost me little. So now I felt quite rich, and, for the first time in my life, it gladdened me to hold money in my hand. I wanted to look well, and I fancied I might improve my appearance by dressing better. Harold had loved me as he found me, so, for him, I would gladly look as pretty as possible.

What my purchases should be was again the subject of conversation as I drove my aunt along the pretty, winding, fragrant lanes, down into the little valley, crossing the bridge over the placid river, through Lord A.'s beautiful chestnut-studded, beech-groved park, which the use of Mr. Swayne's name enabled us to cut across. Then slowly up the one long steep hill of the neighbourhood, across a small tract of open down, where the wind blew fresher, and I fancied the sea might not be far off, and down again gradually, the church-spire and

house-tops and clustering trees of Hard lying beneath us.

Arrived, our pony was dismissed for a few hours' rest. We had so much business to do! Hard was a very small town, but its shops were well supplied, and our fastidiousness had as good a chance of being gratified as at many a larger place.

Aunt Aston and I did not very well agree in our opinions about dress. She had the quietest, most Quaker-like taste for herself, but, for a young person like me, she fancied brighter colours, and recommended pinks and blues and greens most indiscriminately.

My soft, pearly-coloured silk, delicately-patterned muslin, and cloudy-coloured barège, did look rather sober-hued, so I bought some bright pretty ribbons to please Aunt Aston, and then we thought it prudent to ascertain the amount of our expenditure before buying more. I had already made a large hole in my small fortune, so that would do for to-day, we

thought; we must calculate and consider a little before we laid out more there. Then we had visits to pay to the dressmaker and milliner. That last, I remember, was a most unsatisfactory visit. How plain I looked in her gay, flowery bonnets! But in one of soft, transparent white my poor face pleased me better; and in the choice of a second I allowed Aunt Aston to have her way.

I was quite sick of my morning's employment by this time, and my aunt was tired too. She had friends in the town—should we go and see them? I said, "Please no"; and so we went to a confectioner's, and thence sent for our little carriage, and away home. What a time we had spent! I felt a kind of contempt for myself and for my companion, who talked over our purchases with lively interest as we drove home in the golden afternoon silence. I was warm and out of temper, in consequence of which, and of my languid, indifferent driving, I

nearly overset our carriage, and very much frightened my aunt. She was silent, and I penitent, after that.

"A box come by the carrier for you, miss," Mary announced, as she came to lead the pony home, when we had got out.

"For me?—are you sure?" I asked.

"Miss Annie Aston, Thorn Cottage, Ilton, is on it, miss; so I think it's for you." Of course there was but one person in the wide world who would send anything to me. I sat down in the parlour window-seat, and took off my gloves, my bonnet, my shawl, deliberately, before I proceeded to examine its contents.

Mary had considerately had it uncorded by the man who brought it. I opened it at last, and Aunt Aston proceeded to examine the contained treasures. I found a letter on the top, and was fully occupied with that. These things were "for my little wife, whom I have a right to bury under heaps of finery if I choose, and if I

could bear to have her out of my sight; and who has no right to wave gifts of her husband's away with any proud flourishes of her little white hand," the letter said.

Harold had commissioned a lady-friend, a friend of his mother's, to choose these things for him, describing to her the little person whose wearing was to endear them. They were well enough chosen, yet rather too gay perhaps, and much too costly, I thought.

I stood musing, my letter in my hand, turning over with my foot quite absently the heap of treasures Aunt Auston was examining. I was doing mischief; my shoe was dusty, and with it I was touching a white lace something. Aunt called out to me, and then I roused myself, and listened to her comments.

"Annie, I'm afraid Mr. Warden is extravagant, dear; you must talk to him about it. How beautiful this is! We must send that to be made up—the coach passes our door this evening at six; you must choose

what you will send. Did you see this brooch and bracelet—pearl and amethyst!—is it not pretty? You must be married in this; it is lovely! How you will astonish the people in the village! and the church is quite at the other end of it. How will you get there?—there will be such a crowd! My dear child, what will you do with all these things?"

"Look here, aunt," I said. I had found a little separate packet of silk and ribbons, all of a pretty sober colour, on which was written, "For Miss Aston (Annie's aunt)."

"How very kind and thoughtful he is!" aunt exclaimed.

"Of course he is, auntie dear," I said, proudly, my heart swelling with happiness. "The poor dress I had meant for you is thrown into the shade."

We made a selection from among my abundance, and despatched a large parcel to Hard by the coach that evening. Among the variety I had found one dress fit for

Mary's wearing, by presenting her with which I quite won her heart.

My unrestful spirit was beginning to weary of Thorn Cottage at the close of the fortnight. The low, rich, lovely country even became tedious, as I had nothing to do but enjoy it. I longed for hill-climbing, and most intensely for that great treat Harold had promised me, being by and on the sea. I was tired of dreaming over my needle-work, in my long walks, in the hay-fields, in the night-time—dreams I had no one to share: my spirit was thirsting to taste the communion, the perfect sympathy, which I fancied was to take all the pain of over-fulness from my soul for the future. My aunt could only sigh and smile, warn me not to hope too much, and caution me that in marriage, no doubt, as in every temporal estate, there was much to endure as well as much to enjoy. "Not hope *too* much!" I startled her one day by passionately exclaiming, "Was there then no joy in life? My past had been bitter

enough to give me a right to demand joy for my future." My aunt began a tearful and prayerful and tender little lecture on meekness, and patience, and trust; but I could not bear it then, and went away with a perturbed spirit. I sat in my window upstairs till it grew dusk enough for the moonlight to show its power. I had found a sweet thought before I had sat there long. Harold—my *one* friend, hope, joy—my life, my very life—was coming to-morrow. And I had forgotten all doubt, and all anger at the one who raised doubt, and had sat long smiling out into the moonlight, and hugging my happiness, when my aunt came timidly in. She had a candle in her hand; I thought she had been crying. "He is coming to-morrow, to-morrow!" I whispered, as we bade each other a very loving good-night. I lit the candle she brought me from hers, soon to put it out, for I liked the moonlight-streaked dimness.

Next day, aunt was much more fluttered

and nervously expectant than I. Then she was *so* full of business, too! though what she had to do, I could not imagine.

Her dress fitted admirably, and became her very well. Everything of mine that I cared to have then, was ready: it seemed to me that we might sit down and wait quietly.

I forgot to say that I had made the acquaintance of my aunt's polite friend, Mr. Swayne. He was a widower; his wife had been my aunt's schoolfellow and one particular friend; so there was the intimacy of almost relationship established between them. He was to be present at our marriage, giving me away, and at his house Harold would sleep the one night of his stay in Ilton.

While my aunt fluttered and flitted about the house, up-stairs and down, and in and out the kitchen, I did what I could; filled every glass and vase I could find with fresh flowers, took the covers, at my aunt's request, from the pretty furniture, and superintended the

hanging of snowy muslin curtains in the windows; then there was no more to be done anywhere, I was sure.

Harold would come by the coach at six in the evening. Tea was to be ready for him, and more substantial fare. I had first smilingly, then gravely, to remonstrate with my aunt about the over-abundance of eatables she wanted to provide.

"Gentlemen had such appetites—when they came off long journeys, especially," she said.

I put off my black dress that day. Early in the afternoon aunt and I went up to make our toilettes. I looked anxiously at my face in the glass. Country air had done something for me. The hue of my skin was freshened, and my cheeks boasted a little colour. I put on a pretty new dress, the tint of which suited me. It was not too bright, too dingy, or too delicate. My brown hair (I had plenty of it then) I braided very carefully. I fastened my soft lace collar

with a pretty brooch—not the grand one, but one of Harold's presents, nevertheless. I had protected my hands carefully since the first morning, and the scars of the scratches had disappeared from them and from my cheek, and the transparent lace sleeves fell cloudily and becomingly down over those hands he admired. How carefully I looked at myself—scrutinisingly and gravely—till the very gravity of my poor face provoked me to laughter. But I thought of Harold—fancied him—so grand, and tall, and handsome—standing beside me, and turned away from the glass, disconsolately sighing out, "What can he find in poor little me!" I gathered a dark red rose from beneath my window, and put it in my hair, but without venturing to look at myself again.

I was warm; for it was a very brilliantly-sunny afternoon—but a delicious breeze came in at the open casement; so I sat down there to read. I had a book Harold had given me "because every one was talking

about it"—a new poem—in my hand. I had not much cared to read it, as he had not done so, and I should not be following where his eyes and thoughts had gone before. I had had the book a month, and had not opened it; and now I turned over the leaves, carelessly, at first, but my attention was soon caught.

I have that book lying by me as I write—it delights me still. I can read it more aright now, but not with the interest of feeling of that time. I had wanted to forget my sickening expectation for a little while. I was soon completely absorbed, forgetting even the giver of that as of all my other pleasures. Is it not often the way of the world to forget the giver in his gifts?

It was not a book to be easily read, understood, and forgotten. It called out all the power of my nature. I read on breathlessly, only, when my eyes were dim, pausing to look up and out over the warm, wavering Summer land.

My aunt knocked at my door, and then came in, saying,

"I would not disturb you before, Annie; but now it is nearly six, I thought you could not know how late it was."

"Indeed I did not," I answered. "It is so very, very beautiful!"

"What is, my love?"

"This book I have been reading—a poem Harold gave me; we must take it away with us: he must read it—we will read it together."

"Then he likes poetry as well as you do?" asked my aunt.

"Of course," I answered, confidently.

"How nicely you look! I am sure he will be pleased. But you are so like your mother! The brow and eyes are hers exactly, and——"

"You do think I look well?—really, dear aunt? Better than the little dusty, dusky traveller, who stood at your door a fortnight since, to-morrow?" I asked, anxiously.

"Yes; you are not like the same creature."

"I am very glad you think I look well."

I picked up the book reverently (I had dropped it when Aunt Aston startled me), and put it with things I was to take away with me; and then we went down-stairs.

I walked up and down the room while we waited—I could not sit still. The rumbling of wheels reached us in the country silence, while the coach was a long way off. But it was at the gate at last. Harold jumped off almost before it stopped, much to aunt's alarm, who was peeping shyly out from behind the curtains. I did not know if I ran out, or stood still, or what I did; I only knew that soon I was gathered within Harold's arms, and then held off at a little distance and examined. I raised my eyes inquiringly to his; I was soon sure that he was satisfied, and glad to cast them down, because the hot blood would rush blindingly across my face.

Then he introduced himself to my aunt, and thanked her, so heartily and cordially that tears sprang to her blue eyes, for having taken such excellent care, as my appearance testified, of me. And when he sat down she forgot how tall he was, and how afraid of him she had been, and they chatted away easily and gaily; and all the while my hand was clasped so close and tight in his! We had tea, and then we—Harold and I—went out into the hay-fields. Aunt ran after us to the door to beg Harold to take care not to knock his head as he went out; and he laughed his honest laugh, and she went smiling back, and upstairs into my room, to make some last arrangements for me.

The hay-fields that night! For neither of us were there ever such hay-fields again. Oh! my husband,—you were happy then!

Next day we were married. I said farewell to my good aunt, to pretty Ilton, to bluff Mr. Swayne, and we went forth—he and I. For a little while I mused over the

anxious, sad expression of Aunt Aston's face, but soon forgot to wonder at it any longer.

CHAPTER II.

SO I stood, that night—a wild, weird night—leaning against my husband with folded arms; loving to measure my insignificance, to be at his side, not much more than reaching to his elbow, yet "as high as his heart,"—to look up into the handsome face, so far above me when held erect, so often stooped down tenderly to mine. And I mused over the bitter things of my past life, imagined the happiness to come for both of us, the happiness of hours, days, years, and a whole life spent together; never knowing end of love, nor weariness of loving. And I felt peace, and

knew rest—for a little while—standing secure in the certainty of possession.

We were on our way to Scotland. The wind blew round us, sometimes driving the waves so violently against the ship's side that the foam splashed up in my face, and driving the clouds recklessly and violently across the wild sky and the pale struggling moon. And we were rocked up and down, yet standing firm together, the wind and the sea singing us an inspiriting song, a loud soul-thrilling anthem; but too loud and too shrill for an epithalamium.

The other passengers had disappeared one by one—we were alone. I could have remained there for ever, I thought, so supported, so serenaded. Breaking into the world of my imaginings came my husband's voice.

"Annie, darling, it is getting cold! What a rough night it is!" And as he spoke, the strong encircling arm drew my wrappings closer. He went on: "You must not stay

here any longer, love—you had better go below, and try for a few hours' sleep, for it is long past midnight. I shall get a cigar, and walk up and down a little—I am quite chilly, and I am sure you must be."

No, I was not; and I did not want to go down out of the wind and the foam-splash into the close atmosphere of the ladies' cabin. I, leaning there, against his heart, had not thought of being cold.

"Get your cigar, if you must have one, Harold, but let me stay, please," I pleaded. "I am not cold at all, and I know I shall not sleep down there, it will be so stifling."

But a drizzly rain began to fall; of course staying out all night would have been a most irrational proceeding, and my husband was very wisely decided. He took me down-stairs, guiding my feet carefully in the uncertain light from the lamp at the bottom, and left me at the door of the den, as I called the crowded sleeping-place. Already I had seen, or fancied, that he would expect

from me only an implicit and child-like obedience. As yet I had found it very sweet to obey, where to obey had only been to do what was most pleasant; to-night I was inclined to rebel; it was so stiflingly close and warm down there, "might I not go up again?" But Harold pressed a "Good-night" on my lips, pressing me the while to his heart, and my impatience vanished, and I obeyed.

I lay a long time, rocked on my uncomfortable couch, with my eyes obstinately wide open, listening to the firm, rather heavy footstep pacing to and fro above me. At last, I suppose, I fell asleep listening, and then the step crushed painfully into my heart and brain, and I awoke in trouble and affright. It was new to me to be on the sea, it was awful, the waves rushed so fiercely past the little window against which I lay! I could but dimly see, yet I heard and felt them; they stirred, not fear, but a wild, half-pleasant excitement within me.

I listened again to the steps above; I felt half-jealous that without me he found pleasure in lingering there so long. At last I heard the sound no longer. "He is going to sleep now," I thought; so I voluntarily closed my eyes, pillowed my cheek on my arm, and composed myself for quiet slumber.

When we touched land next day, all was wrapped in a mist-mantle; we could see nothing, but we went on by land to our first resting-place,—reaching it in the evening. On the morrow I saw the sun shine upon one of the most lovely places in the Highlands,—lovely and grand at once, and more beautiful than I could bear.

Harold had thought to surprise me,—thought I should admire it,—was very glad it was fine weather. I had never till now seen anything of mountainous, or even hilly scenery; the pretty country round Ilton was the most beautiful feature of Nature's face I had ever grown acquainted with.

Now, I stood by the side of the loch in the morning—the early morning. I looked down towards the sea; up to the splendid peak above peak of mountains rising one beyond the other, as far as I could discern; across the wide, still blue water, to the graceful hanging woods, and heathery sheep-dotted slopes on the other side. What could I do? My heart was swelling, my eyes kindling and dilating, my cheek flushing and chilling—I clasped my hands tightly together, almost as if in pain.

At that moment Harold came up, with a bright, laughing face, and hurrying step, and eyes fixed only on me.

I turned to him; I remember he stopped and looked at me wonderingly. I did not notice that then; I uttered a little of my admiration and delight, in words that seemed to me mockingly poor and feeble. I looked up in my husband's face for sympathy: he smiled down on me, kindly as ever; but somehow my haughty spirit rose

up in arms against that smile; a flashing look of something like disdain aimed at him fell back on me, paining only my own heart, and a miserable doubt and dread darted through me.

Breakfast was ready, the urn waiting, and the salmon steaks on the table, Harold said. So I walked in beside him, not taking his offered arm, pretending not to see it.

The day was very warm and lovely, and we spent it on the water. We had hired a light little boat; Harold rowed it across to the other side; we explored that shore a little, then we moored our boat to the stump of a felled tree, and sat in it under the shade of the wood that hung far over the margin. We enjoyed the gentle rocking motion, the sound of the ripple against the side, and the delicious freshness of the light breeze that came up from the sea, and breathed upon our faces. We talked little, and very softly. I had taken off my hat for coolness, and I sat in the bottom of our boat, resting

my head against my husband's knee. I liked to feel his hand every now and then, passed caressingly and lovingly over my hair.

"Shall I read to you, Harold?" I asked, after we had sat so a long while, and I fancied he might be wearying of idleness, though I was not. Already I consciously recognised a difference between us.

"If you like, Annie," he answered; "if it won't tire you; but it is very hot."

I produced my treasured book, the book he had given me. I told him how beautiful it was, how much he would like it; and then I began to read. I read in a low subdued voice: I did not want to break in upon the harmony of the soft music made by wind and water.

How quietly I went on, and yet how deeply and troublously the poet's thoughts moved me! Sometimes I felt my cheek grow chill, and my eyes dim with tears, as some passage thrilled through me.

After I had read some time, I glanced round.

"Is not that true? Have we not felt it?" I said, looking up to my husband's face, seeking to meet its expression of emotion and pleasure.

His eyes were closed, his arm rested on some cushion he had brought for me and I had not cared to use; his head was thrown back upon that arm, and he was fast asleep! I looked at him long, half in anger, half in love. I see the face now as it looked then. His sleep was child-like in its perfect repose, his brow was so smooth, his mouth so quietly happy in its expression, his breathing so low and regular. At least he must be dreaming some beautiful dream—dreaming only of me, perhaps, I thought.

I had lifted my head from its resting-place; I did not replace it; I sat quite erect, and kept myself very still. I put a fern-leaf, from a bunch of them I had in my hat, to mark the place where I had left

off reading, and then closed my book. For some time I sat watching the ripples in the water, and listening to Harold's breathing, with a cloudy face, and a heart that had not quite made up its resolve whether or no to resent this neglect. I got tired of sitting in dignified rigidity. I leaned over the boat's side, and amused myself with the broken reflections of my face and hands in the water; with splashing it up softly to my forehead, and seeing the separate drops, pearl-like, fall back upon the face of the loch. And I thought of Undine and water-sprites, good and ill, and tried to look to the bottom of the water,—that seemed to repel my glances by flashing back its own brightness dazzlingly on my eyes,—and imagined the sights, fair and foul, that might lie there, till I almost saw strange eyes and hands, gazing at me, beckoning to me, from below. Then I drew back to the other side, and folding my arms, gave myself up to day-dreaming. I knew it must

be quite late in the afternoon now; the wind had quite died away, the water did not ripple, our boat did not stir; there was a great dream-silence, under-toned by the faint hum and buzz of insects in the near wood.

A very audible yawn and noise of stretching and stirring told me that my husband was waking at last. The noise broke in jarringly upon my delicious dreaming; it was so loud, so grossly mortal! I did not look up or speak, but sat gazing straight before me, far away.

"Why, I have been asleep, I declare!" Harold exclaimed. "It is just five o'clock. Why didn't you wake me, Annie? You should have thrown some water in my face. You have been sitting there, quiet and patient, waiting for your lord's awakening, eh, you darling little mouse? How stupid you must have thought me!"

"I was very well amused," I answered, coldly.

"How? Reading, I suppose?"

"No; with my own thoughts."

"Your own thoughts, you saucy girl! Have you anything belonging to yourself, then? Were they not partly mine, those amusing thoughts—eh, Annie?"

"Whatever else I may owe to you, I have still a right to consider my thoughts free, have I not, my lord?" I asked, only half jestingly.

"You are angry, Annie! Come, you are vexed with me for going to sleep while you were reading. Your voice is so sweet, it soothed me. If you had been speaking, I should have listened to the words; as it was, I thought only of the dear voice."

"Did not the book please you?" I asked.

"To tell the truth, I did not understand much of it; I do not care for poetry; you cannot think how strange it seems to me, that it should be the occupation of a man's life to rack his brains for out-of-the-way

thoughts about people and things, and then to twist and turn them ingeniously upside-down and hind-side-before, till he has set them into jingling order."

"And that is your notion of poetry?" I asked.

"Do you not think it a just one?"

"Do you not like music?"

"Why do you ask? The two things are so perfectly different. Yes, I like cheerful music; I don't pretend to understand the classicality of the art. But, my dear child, don't let us discuss art, or philosophy, or poetry now. You look pale; I am sure you are cold and tired. I am very sorry; it was very stupid of me to fall asleep. Please to forgive me, and I won't do so again."

"Pray do, as often as you feel inclined. I will learn not to mind it, I assure you," I answered.

"Learn not to mind, Annie! What do

you mean? I do not want you to learn anything. I want you to be happy, and leave everything else to me."

"We must learn while we live, people say. It strikes me I shall have much to learn before I shall be able to do what you wish."

Harold sprang up hastily. He nearly upset the boat in doing so; the side on which I was sitting touched the water's edge. I lost my balance, and should have made acquaintance with the bottom of the loch, concerning which I had been speculating, had not his strong arms been thrown round me.

"Good heaven, Annie!—My wife!"

I had been on the farther side from the shore—the water was deep—no help near—he could not swim. All this flashed through his mind, and I felt how the heart beat against which I was pressed.

"God grant you have not saved what you would have been happier for the losing!"

something compelled me to say, as I looked up in his face.

There was love itself, most beautiful and perfect, looking out from his eyes into mine, and I did not any longer struggle in his em brace.

"God be praised!" he murmured, as he gently released me, and set me down in the middle of the boat, when, at last, it had ceased its perilous rocking to and fro. I did not cherish my wicked spirit any longer. He took the oars and rowed back. We were both grave and silent for a little while; but Harold's gravity soon vanished, as did all traces of emotion, save that he lifted me out of the boat, and put me down far from the edge of the loch, as if he could not trust me near the water again.

"I ordered dinner at five," he said, as we walked up the beach; "now it is half-past. Mrs. Mac-Something will grumble, I am afraid. You won't be long at your toilette, Annie? Remember we are to

climb the mountain to see the sun set, this evening."

The evening was only just pleasantly advanced and cool when we set out on our little expedition. Harold had managed to hunt up a pony for me, as we had some two or three miles to go. He was very merry, and we laughed and chatted gaily as he led my steed and strode on beside me. But when we came to the narrow glen between high, threatening masses of rock, that shut out the sunlight, and frowned blackly down on us, the light talk and laughter pained me; it seemed impious, my heart echoed it so hollowly. I put my hand on Harold's lips, and said, "Be quiet, please!" very gently. He kissed my hand, and obeyed, seeming to understand; or else it was the grey shade that made his face look grave and pale; and we wound up in silence. I dismounted soon, as the way got rougher; the boy who had followed us took the pony, and we went on alone—

we two, who should have been not two, but one.

The highest peaks were almost inaccessible, but the one we ascended was comparatively easy to climb, and we had been assured that the view was "awfu' grand." When we were at the top, the sun was setting; we were just in time. I drew my arm from Harold's. I planted my feet firmly on the craggy ground. At first everything swam before my eyes in a kind of mist of glory; but after a few minutes' steady gazing, all became distinct.

My soul strove and struggled, it essayed to dilate wide enough to take in all the beauty, the glory, the grandeur; it endeavoured, passionately, to make God's things its own, containing them. It did not, owning humbly its child-like position and dependence upon the same Being, whose glory was now partially revealed to it, then take a meek, a reverent, an awful joy, in thinking of the Maker of the Universe, as the

Father and Friend of every living soul. No! there was strife and pain, and impotent self-abasement, and as impotent, because as blind, aspiration within me. I forgot I was not alone. I cried out in the strange agony, and clenched my hands.

Then I felt myself clasped in his arms, I was turned round, I could see no longer, I felt as if some divine inspiration had been kept off from me by that human presence. Harold's calm, kind voice, was saying,

"You are too excitable, my darling; I would not have brought you here, if I had known it; you will make yourself ill; be quiet, and lean upon me."

But I struggled till I was free. Struggled so fiercely out of the darkness in which he held me, into the red, glorious, glowing light, that he let me go, and stood looking at me wonderingly. The calmness of his half-pitying look irritated me yet more. I poured out a torrent of wildly passionate words: as soon as they were spoken I

would have given more than my life to recall them; but we were both silent. Harold drew my arm through his, and led me down.

I was miserable; ungrateful wretch that I was! I shed bitter tears as we proceeded home in the twilight. I thought I had wounded my husband deeply by my mad, impatient, ungracious words. Before I slept, I had thrown myself on my knees, sobbed out my sorrow, my wretchedness, and entreated his pardon. I remember he took me up and kissed me, as he might have done a child; he did not understand, one whit, what it was all about; he had almost forgotten that he had received any cause of offence; I found that to him it seemed a light matter; that in future I need not give way to any such agonising apprehensions of having wounded his calm, not easily-perturbed spirit.

He was too simply unperplexedly good for my comprehension. Yet I throned myself on an imagined elevation of intellectual

superiority, and scorned his child-like singleness of heart. But this unhappy feeling grew up gradually; there was many a struggle first. I wished to believe my husband a hero, and so to worship him; but the only heroic aspect of his character was the very one in which my eyes could not see him.

I was a heathen, my husband a Christian! Do not be startled and call up visions of Hottentots, or dark-skinned creatures of any nation; I was only spiritually dark. I had always lived with professing Christians; I had heard their professions, and felt their practice, and I was in heart truly a heathen. My Aunt Aston was the only person of Christian practice with whom I had been acquainted; of her I had seen little, and had always inclined to indulge something like contempt for her weakness of character and timidity of nature.

While I lived with the Stones, Sunday after Sunday saw my place in the church-pew regularly filled by my person. My per-

son, I say advisedly, for in my life of slavery the time of service on the Sunday had always been a time of liberty : a time for the indulgence of day-dreamings, and wild, strange fancyings. The Stones lived in an old cathedral town, and we always attended the cathedral service ; the music there was very fine ; the organ was magnificent, and its tones gave a mystical elevation to my musings. Mine was the darkest corner of the pew ; there I shrank back, and dreamed with open eyes the long sermon through.

The first Sunday we were in the Highlands was passed at a place within easy distance of a church—a place my husband had, for that reason, taken some pains to reach the preceding day. It was a wild country place. The houses were scattered far and wide, and apparently there were but few of them ; yet the church was full to overflowing, and the people in the plain, unadorned old building, neat and sober in attire, serene and reverent in countenance,

impressed me forcibly. Everything was sternly simple about the service and the preacher. Sitting beside my husband, I, glancing up into his composed and attentive face, liked its expression—it was grand in its calmness. I would not have ruffled it for the world; and as I found that, once or twice, his eyes sought mine, and that he then looked uneasy, observing my straying and dreamy glances, I tried to listen too. But the art could not be learned in one day, and my thoughts would wander.

In the evening Harold asked me, rather doubtfully, if I would go again to church, or stay at home—he was going. I would go, I said, and his face brightened. The evening service was very short, and we were soon out again. It was a lovely evening. I felt, in my husband's words—in many a little expression and turn of thought,—that this Sabbath worshipping was, for him, no empty form—that he came from it holier and happier. That evening there was a kind of

sweet, serious, chastened gravity in his tone and in his tenderness, that drew my heart nearer his than I had felt it before, and yet made me feel half afraid of him. Very docile in spirit as well as in act, for once, I tried to learn of my husband.

We paced along the low, wild sea-shore, under the stars, in the balmy night air, and I tried to make him speak plainly to me of his faith and hope as a Christian. A girlish shyness on his part—or what appeared to me such—prevented my getting at the depth of his religious feeling. He seemed to have a vague awe and dread of speaking of these things. If this Religion were a real thing, it seemed to me that it would bear to be looked at in the face—to be spoken of in plain words; but I could get from Harold nothing but indefinite generalisations. Of his individual experience I could learn nothing, and I did not want to hear from his lips any of the trite common-places I had heard so often before. I found that my

husband could not reason—could not even give a reason for his faith. I ought to have looked to his life for the teaching I wanted.

After this evening, the subject of religion came to be an avoided one between us. I am sure I had unwittingly pained Harold by my tone, and I think he dreaded to find out how shallow were the waters of my belief. He loved me so well that even this shadowy imagining and dread weakened his own faith. He loosed his anchor from its firmest hold in the haven of true rest, and so was more at the mercy of the wind and waves, liable to be wearily driven about and tossed.

All my influence—and I gradually grew to have much—over my husband was injurious to him—unhappy for him; it was of a destructive kind for any woman to possess—of a fiendish kind for any woman to wield. He grew to fear my uncertain temper—my scorn or sarcasm—expressed seldom, perhaps, by words, but often by

look and gesture,—which he read too much aright. I loved power diabolically, because for its own sake. I felt my power over him, and made him feel it too.

Our sojourn in the Highlands was, on the whole, a happy one; looked back on from a later time, it showed very fair and bright. I would willingly have prolonged it, but I fancied my husband began to show signs of weariness at the close of a month; so we went home.

CHAPTER III.

MY home was very beautiful. Harold's thoughtful love had collected there books, birds, pictures, music, flowers—everything he could think of that should help to make my solitary morning hours pass away swiftly and pleasantly. My heart would have been very, very hard had it not been deeply grateful in its first surprise. Our coming to such a home could not be anything but happy. I thought, when he planned and arranged all these things, how many beautiful anticipations of future happiness must have been clustering and brightening round my dear husband's heart.

Such reflections quite subdued me, filling me with a strange pitying love for him. For awhile I kept such a strict watch and ward over my tongue and temper, ruled my rebellious nature with such an iron hand, that everything went smoothly and prosperously; I guarded Harold's heart from the only thing that could wound it; in cherishing his happiness I found my own. But I had no real and sufficient occupation; so much time and nothing to do in it; such a superfluity of unapplied power—such a lack of necessary patience. I soon became conscious that there was always a great aching void at my heart. While I had dreamed of finding sympathy with every thought and emotion, a constant stimulus to all aspiration and mental exertion, I did not always find myself even understood. After awhile my vague uneasiness deepened into torturing longing and disquiet.

In my drawing-room I had found a splendid piano. Harold had said he liked

music. I fancied I had discovered both an occupation and a motive for it, when I applied myself heart and soul to the cultivation of my musical power. The slightest expression of a wish to take lessons, placed the services of a first-rate master at my disposal. I had the taste of a real musician, and was already more than ordinarily accomplished in the art; now I studied root and branch, theory and practice, throwing all my unapplied energy into my endeavour. My zeal lasted through a whole Autumn and Winter. I wanted to surprise Harold by my performance, so I never let him hear my practice. I employed myself in the composition of a piece. I had attempted this before in the long, lonely evenings often spent at the school-room piano at the Stones'. The theme of this present effort was very wild and fanciful; mournful in the beginning—more mournful in the end—dying out into the extreme silence of death. Midway between beginning and end was a

lively movement, full of some great tumultuous joy.

I submitted my MS. to my master's perusal. He played it through once or twice. I interrupted him impatiently, to show him an ill-expressed meaning. When he had finished, he bowed and paid me some compliments, showing me tears in his eyes; but I did not listen or heed—I only wanted the use of his knowledge, not the expression of his praise; and so I somewhat haughtily gave him to understand. He bowed again, and then favoured me with some straightforward criticisms that were really useful.

It was the London season; my husband wished to see me do the honours of his beautiful house. So we were to give a very large party. It rather pleased me to be the centre of attraction in a large circle, and yet I despised myself for the pleasure it gave me. In this, as in many things, I felt my two natures at war.

This particular evening it was more pride

for my husband than any care for the opinion formed of me, that determined me to appear to the best possible advantage. I knew many of his old friends and associates would be present, and I wanted him to feel not only not ashamed, but proud, of his wife.

In spite of everything incongruous in our natures, I loved Harold passionately; even when in my maddest moods I rendered him scorn and unwomanly despising in lieu of that wifely duty and loving gratitude he might so justly claim from me—even then I loved him. I never lost sight of this love—it made a torture of many things which indifference would have helped me to bear easily. I had a passionate power of loving in my nature—on whom else could I lavish it?

That night we were happy and gay; we stood in the drawing-room together, waiting our friends, and chatted merrily over the fire. There was nothing to excite any of the feeling which Harold did not compre-

hend in me, so it slumbered a dead sleep, and I was quietly content. I was not in the least nervous about the reception or amusement of our guests, though this was our first attempt of the kind. Our rooms looked beautiful, ornamented and perfumed with hosts of lovely flowers. Harold was more than satisfied with my appearance—we were sure all would go well. My husband seemed to expect me to be very timid and anxious, and in want of encouragement; and when I looked up fearlessly in his face, and told him I was not at all uneasy—that I did not care enough about any of these people to be at all afraid—that only for his sake, that he might not feel ashamed of his poor little wife, should I trouble myself at all about them, he looked down on me with a half-pleased, half-puzzled expression, that amused me.

"What a very majestic little queen you would make!" he exclaimed, stooping down to kiss me.

"Mr. Gower," a servant announced just at that moment; but that gentleman had contrived already to be in the middle of the room, though we had heard no noise. Harold greeted his guest in rather a confused manner, and I in the coldest and proudest way.

This gentleman had already been introduced to me, and I disliked him. Harold always appeared to the least possible advantage in his presence. Mr. Gower had a manner of lording it over him which I deeply resented; he seemed to feel for my husband a curious mixture of liking and contempt. I was vexed he should have heard our nonsense, as I knew he would consider it. We were a very uncomfortable trio for the few minutes that elapsed before anyone else arrived; I drew myself up stiffly, only vouchsafing Mr. Gower a word or look when it was absolutely necessary. I knew this man had possessed great influence with my husband in his bachelor days; during our

courtship I had sometimes heard of Mr. Gower, and always in a way that inclined me, half from jealousy, to think unfavourably of him. His careful observation of me, of which I was all the time aware, rendered my reception of our first guests ungraceful and embarrassed; but I soon succeeded in divesting myself of the troublesome consciousness of that observance.

It was very pleasant to me to see Harold moving about the thronged rooms, always over-topping everyone else, so that his handsome, loving eyes seemed to find out his little wife in whatever corner she might be. But when our eyes met, and mine brightened under his look, withdrawing them I was sure to find Mr. Gower observing us. Whether he stood, as he often did, leaning against some door, or table, or part of the wall, idle and indifferent, or whether he were engaged in apparently animated and earnest conversation, he always seemed to be watching me.

I exerted myself to talk and to please; often I found myself the centre of a brilliant circle, listened to admiringly,—and I thought I only liked this because it so evidently gratified my husband. It was a new phase of life to me, and yet it seemed strangely old and worn already, before that evening was half over. In the gay, superficial, or technical conversation about books and things—the things being pictures, operas, and so forth—no deep notes were struck, or if they were, it was by so mere a chance, by so careless a hand, that they seemed to deserve no heed, till Mr. Gower drew near; then the tone of the gossiping prattle always changed. He chose to interpret earnestly some careless sentences of mine, giving them a profound, hidden meaning; he tried to draw me out, to make me feel he understood me, and was worthy of something more than I gave others. But I grew silent in his presence; I would not be interested by him, and slipped away from the circles

he joined. I felt, in some strange, half-angry way, afraid of him.

There were many fine professional and amateur musicians present; among the former, of course, my master. I was asked to play.

"I hear that Mrs. Warden is a very accomplished musician," Mr. Gower said, coming up to Harold. "I am told she has composed a piece which shows wonderful talent, and even genius. We must hear it, Mrs. Warden," he added, turning to me.

Now the surprise and pleasure my playing would give Harold, were to be the crowning triumph of my evening, which was altogether to be a triumph—but my own music I had not intended to play. I was very reluctant to do so; to me it seemed a revelation of my inmost soul, and too sacred to be given there and then. But my music-master had noised abroad the fact of the existence of this composition, and I could not avoid letting it be heard without

making much more demonstration of my dislike to do so than I was willing to make.

My MS. was placed on the music-stand—Mr. Gower stood ready to turn over the pages. I felt a presentiment that my music would destroy all my calm and peace for that evening, but I sat down to play. Respect for the mistress of the house in the musician hushed everyone in the room. The first chords—the first wails sounded upon a perfect silence; they stirred my soul powerfully, and then I played on, forgetting all and everything but the meaning and burden of my music. I am sure my cheek changed colour as I went on, it flushed and chilled so rapidly. When I had let the last chords die out into the silence, there arose a great buzz and murmur, and people pressed round me with extravagant expressions of admiration and delight. I sat still a moment, my hands still lying on the keys, my eyes fixed on them—I was bewildered, and wanted my husband. When I rose I

met that strange pair of eyes fixed on me. Mr. Gower had turned over my pages without speaking a word; now he said, "It is too beautiful to be played or praised here." He spoke softly, and offered me his arm; but my eyes had found Harold, and brought him to me, his arm was ready, and I took that, looking up inquiringly, half fearfully into his face. He shook his head and said,

"You should not write such sorrowful music, Annie; it cannot please those who love you. It is not at all my sort; I suppose I don't understand it. But don't look heartbroken; everyone is praising and admiring it, and appearing quite delighted."

I soon left him, and wandered about among my guests. "I might have known he would not like or understand it," I muttered bitterly to myself—"fool that I am!" The congratulations and compliments I received from all quarters only nourished the fever of pain and disappointment in my

heart. When everyone was gone, I sat down before the dying fire and sighed wearily.

"A very brilliant evening, Annie!" Harold said, coming up joyously, and putting his hand on my shoulder. "You have had a decided success, my little wife. You will be quite the rage, if you choose to mix much in society. I said you would make an admirable queen."

His words sounded mockingly in my ears; I sat still and silent, and he went on, standing beside me, and speaking gaily.

"I should not like you to be transformed into a woman of fashion; my little quiet mouse to be talked about and written about, as having been here and there, and said and worn so and so. The idea is ridiculous! Gower was saying, that whatever you did you would do with such earnestness, that I had better take care society did not engross you. But why so grave and silent?"

"Do you think I care for society, or for what your world thinks of me?" I asked,

scornfully, moving my shoulder pettishly away from under his hand.

"Well, love, I did not know; I thought you seemed to enjoy yourself, seemed to be in good spirits. I suppose all women like admiration, and you have been pronounced fascinating, and I don't know what all. How splendidly you did play! How secret you must have been about your practising; you were determined to shine, I see. But why don't you compose something bright and gay and pleasant—something everyone must like and understand—instead of such dismal, incomprehensible music? Do you know, I don't suppose half the people knew what to make of it, only——"

"Do not say any more about that miserable piece! I cannot bear it to-night!" I exclaimed. "I thought you would understand it. O Harold, it is very hard!—when I try hardest to please you, I fail. Do you think I practised, caring to please anyone but you? We shall never understand each

other—never be happy. I am quite weary of trying, weary of everything. You cannot love me as I love you, or you would learn to comprehend me. Everything turns to pain, to torture. What have I done, that I may never be happy? I have no one but you—no one; and there is no sympathy between us. We shall leave off loving each other; I shall turn your love to hate. I wish I were dead—dead and at rest!" I began to sob violently. I felt what the expression of my husband's face was; though I did not look up at him.

"What is the matter, Annie?" he exclaimed. "For God's sake, be quiet—for my sake. Miserable! What have you said? You are worn out and over-excited, poor child! Pray, pray be quiet. Remember——"

"Yes—I remember everything!" I answered. "That only makes it worse. I ought to be happy! Yes, of course I ought. You have loaded me with gifts—you have

petted and spoiled me; and now, like a naughty child, I quarrel with my playthings. I am ungrateful, discontented, wicked. I have received thousands of benefits; I am sumptuously lodged, and clothed in fine linen, and yet I hold up my greedy hands, and cry out for something more. Poor child! No; you should say naughty child —you should scold and punish me."

"Annie!" Harold broke in upon my scornful, passionate words; "Annie, you must be quiet, and listen to me."

I shut my lips firmly, clasped my hands tightly round my knees, and sat staring fixedly into the fire. In its dim red hollowness I thought I could discern misery, vista after vista opening before me. How could I live with this torturing, craving, perpetual restlessness at my heart? It had been gone a little while; now it came back worse than ever; it would abide there always, I thought. Must my soul live all those future long, long years alone? wandering on without aim or

purpose, finding no rest for her world-worn feet? No! I would die first—or, at least, I should go mad.

And I sat harbouring like bitter thoughts, gazing before me with hot, dry eyes, though my passionate tears still wetted my cheeks.

Harold had not spoken. At last I glanced at him. He too sat looking into the fire; he had seated himself near me. A world of perplexed thought troubled and clouded his face. He felt my eyes on him, and turned his head slowly round to me. He spoke very gently and tenderly.

"I see how it is, Annie. Yes, I do not always understand you; sometimes I disappoint and pain you. You have often borne with my dulness patiently, but to-night your disappointment was more than you could bear. Yes, it was very hard, after you had been thinking you should please him, to have your husband the only one who did not admire your music. You are very

clever, and have many thoughts and feelings into which I do not enter. I did not know you, Annie, when I asked you to marry me; if I had——"

"You would not have done so!" I exclaimed. "Oh, misery!—then you have left off loving me. I have wearied you with my temper and my violence! You thought you had won a good and quiet wife—one who would have kept your house in order—have been always ruled by you—have made her world your world—one who would have been always grateful and cheerful, and content; and instead—— Indeed I do not wonder you cannot love the creature."

"You shall not speak so!—hush! I love you—you know I love you. Cannot I make you happy, my poor wife? I have been wrong and selfish. In my hurry to get the treasure I wanted, I did not pause to think if I were worthy to keep it. You were not happy. I thought, presumptu-

ously, that I could make you so—that my great, entire love would satisfy you. If I was mistaken and wrong, Heaven forgive me! Heaven pity us both—you most—my poor, poor wife!"

He spoke so sadly that my heart melted utterly. I threw myself on the ground, clasping his knees, and sobbed out,

"Oh! Harold, I see it now. You are too good; I am not worthy. Forgive me. What a wife I am to you! I owe you everything, and I poison your peace—make you miserable. No, I will not get up; I will stay here. You must tell me, how shall I make you happy? How can I grow good and quiet? How can I alter myself? You must tell me—you must teach me."

But he would not listen. He took me up in his arms, soothing and caressing me; as if indeed I had been a child, a penitent, passion-weary child, he carried me upstairs. I was obliged to be passive now, because I felt utterly weary; so my head lay quietly

on his shoulder, and my tears rained down quietly, without effort to control or restrain them. But this sweet tenderness was not what I had wanted. I wanted him really to teach me; I wanted to have learnt from him the secret of quiet happiness. Ah! if I could only have governed myself—have spoken calmly and gently, and without tears, passion, or reproaches, have let him know how it was with me! That night I lay awake with the miserable consciousness that I had done no good, but great harm—that now, indeed, poor Harold's heart must be wounded—that I had told my husband that his love could not make me happy—that I was miserable!

Tormented for the few hours before daylight by such thoughts as these, I grew more and more restless and feverish. Next day, and for many days after, I was very ill, and during all the time my husband's tender, self-forgetting care of me was a constant reproach and cause of remorse.

The first day I was downstairs again, and tolerably calm and strong, I made a great effort to speak to Harold about that miserable evening. He would hear no explanations. I was to forget all about it. I had not made myself ill then, he was sure; I was then already feverish. It was all his fault; he ought to have known better than to subject me to so much fatigue and excitement. We had both talked nonsense. Not happy? We were both as happy as the day was long. Could I look in his face and tell him he was not happy? he asked. He had come to the side of my sofa—had sat down by me, and drawn my head from its resting-place, to pillow it on his heart. Lying there, looking up into those most loving eyes of his, I said I was happy then.

It was high Spring-time now. As soon as I was strong enough, Harold took me to the sea-side; there we had a pleasant time.

CHAPTER IV.

"I HAVE brought home Gower to spend the evening," Harold said, one day, soon after our return home. "I thought you would like it. He is fond of music and poetry, and all that sort of thing; so I thought you would get on well together."

I considered that Harold showed a bitter remembrance of those words of mine—I had never forgotten them—in this speech.

"I do not want—" I began; but Mr. Gower was now in the room; it was necessary to receive him civilly.

"Do not want any interruption to your *tête-à-tête* evenings, Mrs. Warden? But you must be generous. Remember how long it is since I have had the pleasure of seeing

you, or my friend Harold. Since the evening when you surprised us all so brilliantly, you have been invisible. I hope," he continued, "you will give us credit for having been sincerely sorry to hear of your subsequent illness. I trust sea-air has quite restored you."

"I am very well now, thank you," I replied. Of course, Mr. Gower could not know the pain his words gave me.

"We have been staying at Seawash," Harold said. "Do you know it at all, Gower? It is very pleasant there. My wife fell quite in love with it, so we shall often go down there again, I think."

"I know it well. One Autumn, some years ago, I was there alone. You know the Devil's Tongue, as they call the longest sharpest point, I dare say, Mrs. Warden?"

"Yes, I do."

"I was returning from a long ramble late one wild evening, and saw the sea—it was very rough,—breaking magnificently on the

rock at the end. I went down, although it was growing dusk, and mounted to the top of the little peak. I was not much above the water, I could see no land; it was awfully beautiful to watch the heaving and breaking, meeting and dashing together of the great, foamy, angry waves. Each wave that came whelming the rock at my feet, seemed as if it might swell up and wash me from my little pinnacle, and as if it hungered to do so. One reads of angry, foamy, troubled seas, but no words that I know can express the fearful excitement roused within one, standing in the midst of such fierce commotion. There was an order in the wild going of the waves, too. I observed how, first, the waters on one side gathered themselves together and came rolling on, swift, and fell as fate, only to be met, scattered and broken, by the great army tumbling on from the other side. What a pigmy I felt standing there! Yet I would not, for much, have missed the experience of the

hour I spent so. The sky was almost as wild as the sea, only along the horizon there was a line of gleamy, watery light;—and between sky and sea I was shut in !"

Some fascination made me raise my eyes from my work to Mr. Gower's kindled face; but I dropped them immediately, and did not speak.

"And you got home safe?" Harold asked. "From the Devil's Tongue people sometimes——"

"Pass into Hell's Throat. Excuse my interruption, I was afraid you might mar, by more delicately expressing, the idea of the nature of the transition to which the boiling, surging world of waters gave birth in my mind. Yes, I got home safe, but not without a little further experience. When I turned and descended from my slight elevation, I saw water before me still; the tide had come up and covered the narrow and lower neck of land along which I approached the end. I tried it cautiously, and was

nearly washed away. I had no desire, unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd, and with all my imperfections on my head, to lose sight of known life to try some unknown, perchance greater ill, so I gave up the attempt to traverse that wave-washed strip of land."

"What did you do?" Harold asked.

"Do, man? Just nothing. I went back to my former station, wrapped myself up tight in my cloak, and waited. Waiting is a famous cure for the ills of this life, Mrs. Warden."

"Did you know that you were safe there on the point?"

"When it was full moon and the sea roughened by a sou'-wester, that point was sometimes washed over, an old boatman had told me, as we rowed past it the day before. I don't pretend to say but that I waited and watched the waters in great anxiety. Sometimes a slight lull in the storm came, and every wave reached less

high than the former had done. Then, with a howl and a scream, the wind rushed across the water, and huge billows would leap, and well, and gurgle up, sometimes over my feet, always drenching me with spray!"

"Well! *chacun à son gout!* You call that an experience which you would not have missed for the world? I cannot understand it! Can you imagine the feeling, Annie?"

I worked away diligently with a quivering hand, and answered absently, without looking up, "I do not know."

"Capital fish you get at that same place," Harold went on. "It is not like most fishing places, where you can't get fish. Dinner ready? Very well. Gower, give my wife your arm. I must follow disconsolately for once."

Mr. Gower's narrative, the voice in which it was told, and the gestures accompanying it, had excited me painfully. The hand laid

on his arm still trembled, but I stilled it by a great effort, yet not soon enough. He glanced at me significantly, and said,

"I think you did know, Mrs. Warden."

"We must have some music after you have given us a cup of coffee, Annie," Harold said when he and Mr. Gower returned to the drawing-room after dinner.

I did not answer. I had secretly determined I would not play. I had not touched my piano since that dreadful evening. The possibility of perhaps having to do so to-night had already given me a nervous headache, of which I thought I would, if need were, avail myself, as an excuse.

Mr. Gower was wandering about the drawing-room abstractedly, opening and turning over my books.

"Oh! you have this true Poet's book," he suddenly exclaimed. He came up to me, book in hand. "Is it not splendid? I am sure *you* like it, though I know very few ladies who do. I know the writer. I can

introduce him to you, if you have any care to see the external features of the poet. Have you?"

"I think not," I answered.

"Ah! Right, right! It is a very vulgar curiosity that, concerning lions; and often its gratification—which proves no gratification—shivers a thousand beautiful imaginings to atoms. Does it not?"

"I don't know. I have had no experience."

"But you do know and have read this book. Ah! here's a leaf of fern put in at one of the most beautiful passages. That is your mark?"

"Is it the book you read to me on that luckless morning?" asked Harold, laughingly.

I blushed deeply as I said "Yes." I do not know exactly why. Mr. Gower looked inquisitive. "Little as you care for poetry, I am sure you admired this *so* read, Warden, did you not?"

"So much that, soothed by the soft sweet voice of the reader, I went to sleep," laughed Harold.

"To sleep!" Mr. Gower gave an expressive shrug. "I have set one or two of these songs to music," he continued to me, "after rather a bungling fashion, I am afraid, but I think my melodies suit their meaning."

"Don't praise yourself, Gower, but let us hear and judge."

"Read the words, then, first," Mr. Gower said, putting the book into my husband's hand.

"Yes, that is pretty enough," Harold said, returning it, suppressing a slight yawn. "Could it not have been said more straightforwardly and comprehensibly in plain prose, though? Don't transfix me with your indignant glances, but let us hear your music."

Harold stretched his great length on the sofa, composing himself to listen. The coffee apparatus was cleared away, and the lamp

brought; and I sat down with my idle work to listen too.

Mr. Gower amused himself at the piano some time—coquetting with his memory. Then he began.

He had a fine voice, powerful, and under great control. The first song was set to wild and passionate music. When he filled the room with the greatest possible power of his voice, I cowered back into the depths of my easy-chair, dropping my work, turning my head away from the musician. I looked at Harold. "Noise enough!" he muttered, rather drowsily, in answer to my look, and closed his eyes.

I had just turned to observe Mr. Gower. I was curious to know if his own music woke any emotion in him. Yes; his voice died away trembling; yet he turned abruptly round to look at me.

He sang song after song, and Harold went to sleep. Harold had had one or two very hard days' work lately, and had

kept late hours. "No wonder he is tired, poor fellow!" I said to myself; and I tried to subdue the great troublous heart-swellings that the strong passionate singing produced in me. Mr. Gower went on singing or playing. It was a pleasure to touch such a magnificent instrument, he said, and since I would not play—for I had refused—he must.

At last I stole to my husband's side, and woke him softly. I thought Mr. Gower did not know he had been asleep; but poor Harold gave such yawns that he quite betrayed himself.

"I shall weary you as well as your husbank, if I go on longer," Mr. Gower said at last, rising from the piano, and coming towards us. "I am afraid I have done so already, Mrs. Warden," he continued, "you look a-weary, a-weary!"

"It is rather late," I said. "I have a head-ache. We have kept bad hours since we returned from the sea-side. Harold has

been hard-worked, and, of course, I sit up for him."

"So you must forgive our having been rather bad company," Harold said. "I have not learnt to do without sleep, as you seem to have done."

"Five hours is enough for any man, when he is once used to it," Mr. Gower said.

"To exist, but not thrive upon," said Harold, glancing at Mr. Gower's very thin, worn form and face.

"Other things than want of sleep have made the ravages you see," Mr. Gower answered, laughingly, and yet with a latent melancholy in the smile that died away very slowly from his face. "It is very well for you, Warden, and for prosperous, easy-going fellows like you, whom fortune favours, and whose life-paths are smooth and plain, to enjoy your eight or nine hours' sleep. But sleep is too expensive a luxury for us poor fellows, who struggle and strive with the world, and follow an exacting mistress, ever

ready to avail herself of the slightest excuse for deserting us."

"Yet you would not change with me? Give up your glorious uncertainties—hopes of fame and dreams of ambition—for my common-place and inglorious certainties! Now, would you?"

"No!" Mr. Gower answered, slowly, sending his eyes out on some far journey, and bringing them back radiant with a strange light,—"no!" he answered, more assuredly, "I would not change. I would rather fight and battle on till death than know the respectable composure, the dignified indifference, of a man good friends with the world. For me there would be no rest in your life. I fancy I have not known what rest is since I was a child. But Mrs. Warden's tired, pale face reminds me to say good night—so good night."

Harold went downstairs with him.

"Harold, do not ask Mr. Gower here again, please," I said, when he returned.

"Why, dear? I thought I had given you a pleasant evening."

"I do not think Mr. Gower is a good man; I do not think we shall either of us be the happier for having him here. No wife ought to find pleasure in the society of a man who shows no respect for her husband. I don't mind his coming when other people are here, but please don't ask him again when we are alone."

"Very well, Annie. I think I can see what you mean. I am sure you are right. Thank you, love. But I am afraid that poor head is very bad again?"

"Yes, but it shall be well to-morrow," I said, resolutely.

I struggled—yes, I did struggle, bravely, but, oh! so blindly! I struggled against knowledge, and pushed it back from me with violent hands, only to have it come and stand there again, on the threshold of consciousness—the knowledge that I was not happy.

Now we were settled at home again, things soon went back into the old miserable way. What was there to prevent their doing so? I had no new power of ruling myself, no new hope for which to live, no new light by which to walk. I loved my husband. Yes; but I know, now, that one poor, weak human love will avail nothing when it stands alone, based on nothing, looking up to nothing.

Harold, seeing me ill and unhappy, urged me to cultivate the acquaintance of some of the many people with whom we had exchanged visits, to try and make friends; but when I told him I wanted only him, and no other friend—that he was enough for me,—he smiled and looked pleased, and said no more.

So I fought on alone, my soul never satisfied, my heart never at rest, and every now and then some outburst of long-controlled bitterness or pain betraying me, and making my husband miserable. He was very

patient, very gentle, very forbearing; but at last even he grew weary. His home came to be a place that he entered timidly, not knowing in what miserable mood he might find his wife. Soon he entered it less willingly, and hurried from it earlier, seeking in his business—in the pursuit of worldly good—distraction from its miseries and cares.

We grew rich—my husband more worldly. Even this blame is mine. I, isolating myself from all human interests and cares, preying on my own heart, grew constantly more morbid, sensitive, irritable, and miserable. The distance between us widened daily. We stood afar off from each other, but God mercifully sent little hands that should have drawn our hearts together.

CHAPTER V.

I HAD been three years a wife before I became a mother. My first baby came to me with the early Summer flowers. I date best by them because, afterwards, many things overlaid such blessed anniversaries, and made it difficult for me to endeavour, and hard for me to dare, to remember when, in what hour, at what season, this or that happened. And yet I can even now bring present to my senses the delicious fragrance and delicate loveliness of the flowers my husband brought to me so often at that time.

After the birth of my darling, there was

a long interval, during which I thought I was at peace; physical weakness made quiet and stillness grateful, and the new great joy seemed to fill and to satisfy my soul.

Again I smiled to myself as I had smiled —how long ago it seemed!—looking out on the lovely Summer beauty of the land round Ilton. I lay still, with meek-folded hands, and smiled into the face of my fair-pictured future, my beautiful new life, through this, my own child. I fancied that all the struggle and pain and perplexity of existence were past; I looked back upon all past misery as one waking to some bliss-ful reality looks back upon an ugly dream of the black night. I had found something so sweet, so pure, so delightfully dependent to live for, that I thought I now had grasp-ed Peace, had detained her with my poor weak hands till she had touched with her holy healing my brow and breast.

"Yes, peace has come to me," I whis-pered, softly smiling to myself, raising the

tiny baby-hand to my lips, while happy tears filled my eyes.

My husband was infinitely glad, and kind and tender. He showed to such advantage in my sick-room! I raised up my happy eyes proudly to him; it was so beautiful to see him subduing his strength to our weakness—my baby's and mine—or exerting it only for us; bending his handsome head down so low, yet then almost fearing to kiss the tiny baby-cheek; looking so concerned if the child uttered a cry, so amused and happy if he woke a doubtful smile in its queer little face! I thought this peace would last. I loved my baby so intensely!—he loved it dearly, and me anew through it. I thought my deep love all that was needful to make me a good mother. I gave up everything to my child, and Harold thought me a paragon, a perfect example of self-denying love. And for a long time we lived—oh! so quietly and happy together!

—we three, my husband, myself, and our child.

Our child was a boy; he grew into a dark-haired, blue-eyed, noble little fellow —a tiny Harold. I turned God's free-given blessing into a bane. How should I, undisciplined, unable to rule myself, be able rightly to educate another life? My husband, with his clear, simple, practical notions, and his decided judgment between right and wrong, was a far more judicious and wise parent than I. The child felt it. I worshipped, idolised him; and he would turn from my wild love to meet his father's calm tenderness. The older he grew, the more plainly he showed this preference.

"You hurt me, mamma, let me go; papa is coming!" the boy exclaimed one day. I had been showing him pictures, telling him stories, lying on the ground beside him; he had been listening with tranced attention, his great blue eyes fixed full on mine; he heard his father's step in the hall, and

directly he struggled to get free from my arms.

"Papa will come; stay with poor mamma, darling. Do you not love mamma?"

"No," the boy answered, boldly. He struggled himself free, pushed me away, and trampled over me with his little eager feet. I ran after him, but could not catch him in time. Harold came in, and my child's head was struck by the opening door; he fell, and cut his forehead against the sharp corner of a table. The blood flowed, and I was terribly frightened. I caught him in my arms; he had turned sick and quiet with the pain, but when I took him, he called out, "Papa, papa, papa, take me!" I could not pacify him, so laid him in my husband's arms.

I ran for water, sponges, and cloths; when I returned, my boy was sitting on his father's knee, leaning his little head back against his shoulder, and smiling faintly at some funny story Harold was telling him,

while he held his handkerchief to the wound. The child let me wash and bathe and plaster up the cut, but all the while he clung to his father's arm, and persisted in saying that mamma had hurt him. He would not come to me, nor kiss me, but soon fell asleep in my husband's arms. Harold carried him up to the nursery, and waited to see him quietly sleeping in bed. I should have done that, should I not? Was I not his mother? This was not the first time my heart had been so wounded. When my husband left the room with our boy, I threw myself on the floor, and gave way to a wild passion of grief. I wailed and lamented, almost raved. Even my child, my own child, did not love me; it engrossed my husband's tenderness, and rendered me no love in return. My passion, indulged, grew uncontrollable. Jealousy gained sole possession of me. Was I to be nothing now—nothing to father or child?

By the time Harold came down, I had

lost all command over myself. He took me up and laid me on the sofa; he knelt beside me, begging and praying that I would be calm—would, at least, tell him what was the matter. I turned my face away, and burying it in the pillows, which I clenched between my aimless fingers, I shook the couch with the strength of my agony. Poor Harold! what could he do, pained and perplexed as he was? He sent for our medical man, but he was long coming. When he arrived, my passion had raved itself out. I was weak as a child, and suffering from extreme exhaustion; but my state revealed to Dr. Ryton the violence of the paroxysm just past. I believe it was after seeing me that day that he began first to entertain the opinion that sometimes I was insane . . . .

It is no use. I cannot write calmly and slowly. I must hurry over all that is to come . . . When I again became the mother of a living child, baby was once more for a

little while an angel of peace in the house. I thought that this child, at least—a girl, with my brow and eyes, they said—should be wholly mine. My husband might engross the affection of our noble boy, if only this little fragile white blossom, this lily of mine, might rest solely and always on my bosom. I did not like to have my husband kiss, I hardly liked that he should see, this baby; I never let him take it in his arms. The first time it smiled brightly at him, and with its little hands clutched at the dark hair of his bent head, acute pain shot through my heart. Do what I could, I was not able to prevent the child from knowing and loving its father. Soon, very soon, I had the agonising though self-induced torture to bear of seeing it turn from my fierce love, to hold out its tiny hands—appealingly, it seemed to me—to my husband. It lisped Papa before ever it had once said Mamma.

Harold's manner to his children reminded me of what it had been to me in the days of

our courtship. There was the same protecting, beautifully sweet, yet manly tenderness. Sometimes I longed to be a child, to share the caresses my boy and girl received. My husband had left off almost all demonstrations of affection for me, but only because I had often manifestly shrunk from them—why, I cannot tell. I loved him, I never ceased loving him.

"Poor mamma is ill," Harold said sometimes, when I closed my eyes, and my brow contracted with the pain that so often throbbed there now. "Go, little one, and kiss her—very quietly."

"Must I, papa?" the little girl would ask. "I don't want to get down."

A few words in a low voice, and then a little soft mouth would be pressed up to my face. Sometimes I pretended to have fallen asleep, and not to feel the touch that thrilled my whole being through; then the play would cease, and my husband would draw the children into another room.

My husband was much at home during that miserable time. I thought it was to keep watch over his children, and I resented this bitterly. Could he not trust them with me, their mother? Of what was he afraid?

Sometimes the indulgent, pitying, curious tenderness with which my husband began again to treat me, soothed me, and I could lie for hours in child-like quiet, with my head resting on his bosom. But this was not the love and sympathy for which I thirsted, and often my spirit rose up in arms, repelling this condescending affection, which mocked the love I craved. It was through the carelessness or maliciousness of a servant that I first heard how my husband was pitied, as the poor gentleman who had a mad wife.

"Mad! they call me mad!" I repeated to myself.

I sent for Dr. Ryton. I cared nothing for what he might think of me. The idea of

madness seemed to my proud, wrong-judging spirit to be attended with a humiliation I would not bear. They might think me anything but mad.

"You think me mad, and have taught my husband to believe me so," I said, in a cold, calm voice, when Dr. Ryton came. He looked at me with a severely scrutinising expression in his grey eyes as he sat down, close by, fronting me. He waited for a moment, as if he expected I should say more, then answered:

"You have taught us to think you so—I had almost said to wish to think you so. Madness was a very gentle name to give your malady; it was conferred in all kindness, in all charity."

"Kindness!" I echoed. "You have taught my husband so to mistrust me that he fears to leave my own children in my charge; and you talk of kindness!"

"Mrs. Warden, reflect! Do you remember when I was last sent for to attend you?

Do you mean to confess that that humiliating wildness of passion was voluntarily indulged?"

I felt the blood rush across my face, but I answered as steadily as he asked:

"Certainly. At the beginning I could have checked and controlled myself. To do so would have given me terrible pain. It was not worth while; it is a miserable relief to give way. After the storm comes a calm. In the weakness that follows after my violence, my head is cooler and clearer, and my heart quieter. Life is fainter, its pain more endurable."

"You speak calmly enough now," Dr. Ryton said. "Can you not see the selfishness and wickedness of all this? Can you not see that, if indeed you are a responsible person—and in that light you wish me to consider you—you are sinning most heinously! destroying the peace of a home; wrecking the happiness of your nobly-good husband; alienating your children's affections

from you; ruining your own soul! By Heaven! madam, you had better wish yourself the maddest poor soul in Bedlam than the voluntary abuser and destroyer you wish me to pronounce you!"

I paused and thought; he sitting there, stooping forward, bent his cold eyes on me steadily. A book lay on the sofa by me. I took it in my hand, longing to throw it in my enemy's face, that, at least for a moment, he might start and his gaze waver. But I thought it very important then to restrain myself. I only played awhile with the leaves, and then put the book down. Doing so, I looked up, and saw a kind of smile gleaming on the grey face opposite to me.

"I see you can control yourself, Mrs. Warden, and I also see the violent nature that is in you," Dr. Ryton said.

"Nature! yes, you are right there," I replied.

"A nature, madam, which you have sin-

fully neglected to control, all the faults of which you have cherished. You are a proud woman; you shrink from the humiliation of being thought mad, but you are blind to the far worse humiliation of allowing the devil within you to rule you."

"Go on, if you please," I said, quietly, as he paused.

"I believe you are miserable, madam. I think you are a servant to whom many talents have been entrusted, and that you have not even only buried them in the earth, but have actively abused them. Your husband is not a man of genius—not even a man of great depth or sensitiveness of feeling; but he has a true heart and a patient soul. He is infinitely your superior. You might well fall at his feet and pray his forgiveness, and let him teach you to ask God's. Have you suffered patiently, as he has done? Have you loved in spite of wrong, as he has done? Have you returned good for evil, as he has done? I know nothing of your history—

why he married you. It was a mistake, no doubt; but you, and you alone, have made it a fatal one."

"I will think of what you say," I answered. "You think I have sinned—sinned—sinned! You do not heed that I have suffered."

"Suffered! You will have to suffer much yet, madam; my prayer for you would be, that you might suffer, till at last the proud spirit should lie low, and be crushed out."

"But it has been pain and suffering and ceaseless unrest and longing that have hardened me. Yet I am not hardened—I would my heart were a stone! I sent for you, however, for one purpose. Are you convinced I am not mad? I can hear no more of anything else now."

"Indeed, madam, before you sent for me, I had begun to understand your case otherwise. You are not mad. God forgive you!"

"Say that again."

"You are not mad."

"You are to tell my husband so—but stay, I hear his step—here he comes; repeat it to him, Dr. Ryton."

My poor Harold came in; he looked wonderingly and anxiously at me.

"Have you been ill again?" he asked.

"I have never been ill in the way you have been taught to suppose; Dr. Ryton, repeat to my husband what you said to me."

"Your wife, Mr. Warden, wishes me to tell you that I have reason to change the opinion I expressed to you some time since."

"Speak more plainly, if you please, sir," I interrupted; "you spoke plainly enough just now."

"In short," Dr. Ryton continued, only pausing while I spoke, not turning towards me, but looking at my husband steadily and compassionately; "she is no more mad than you or I."

"What is it, then?" Harold asked.

"That, Mrs. Warden herself must inform you," he answered.

He went, and Harold attended him to the door. I sat down to think. It was some minutes before Harold came back, and I did not look up to see the expression of his face. I said in a hard voice,

"I want to be alone—I will go to my own room. Lily is in the nursery—Harold will be home from school in half an hour. You will not want me till they go to bed."

"As you like," he answered, indifferently and wearily. "I am going out—don't you remember I told you they wanted you, but you would not come? It is the party at Gower's mother's."

"Going out again to-night—and there?" I asked, pausing at the door.

Harold turned to the window.

"Is it any wonder?" he asked, recklessly.

"No; it is no wonder that you should leave your home so often," I replied, quietly, while a burning recollection of half-heeded

scandal came to my mind. I went up to my room, but I did not pass the hours as I had intended—the poison of a malicious sentence rankled in my heart. I paced gloomily about; a throng of strange thoughts pressed for recognition, but a demon-hand, torture strong, held the entrance against them, and possessed me against my desire, spite of my endeavours. "He loves you no longer! no longer!" a mocking voice cried. I laughed scornfully to myself—I did not believe it; and yet the words came again and again, each time louder than before. I would not doubt—I would know—I thought. The wintry afternoon (it was a bleak March day) had long blackened into night, my fire was almost out, and my room dark and cold, when little feet came pattering up to my closed door, and my children's voices called me. They were come to say "good-night."

I opened my door, but that room was too dim and chill, and peopled with too unholy and unhappy thoughts for them; so, with

my little girl in my arms, and my boy's hand in mine, I went down into the empty drawing-room, where the fire blazed cheerily and the lamps burnt brightly.

"Papa is gone out," Harold said, glancing round the room disconsolately.

"Papa is gone," Lily echoed sadly.

But I sat down by the fire, Lily still in my arms, and bade Harold bring the great book which was his delight, and I would tell him all about the pictures.

It was brought and rested on my knee, the boy lying on the ground beside it. I leaned my cheek against my little darling's soft hair as her fair head rested quietly on my bosom, and I told wonderful stories to my boy, with his upraised, wondering eyes. I was very gentle, and we were very happy. When nurse came there was a great outcry, and so I sent her away again. The children sat up an hour later than usual; my Lily fell asleep upon my bosom, and I carried her upstairs, and put her to bed myself.

"You are a dear, dear mamma to-night," Harold said, when I bent over him and kissed his face after he had lain down. Tears streamed from my eyes—very sweet tears—I went down to the empty drawing-room, and sat by the fire, crying quietly a long while. Then I wiped my eyes and thought. "If he loves me still, if there is yet time," I said, and in my mind I turned over a fair white page of life, and I essayed to lift my heart penitently to God; but I sickened when I thought of all my past, and said "There is no hope—there is no hope!"

It was past midnight when Harold came home—I was still sitting by the fire.

"You up still?" he said, as he came into the room.

I did not answer; there was a great struggle within me, I longed to throw myself on his bosom, or at his feet, and to weep out my strange new thoughts, and hopes, and resolves there; but I knew I

should startle him, and that I had taught him to dread and to hate my tears. Besides, the idle tale I had heard forced itself on my recollection—my pride bade me know if that were true or false, before I humbled myself to one who might no longer care for me.

"Are you not going to bed now?" my husband asked, throwing himself into a chair opposite me.

"Presently," I answered, and stole a look at his face. I could read nothing there; his eyes were fixed on the fire. How should I begin?

"Harold, I have something to ask you!" Something in my voice attracted his attention; his eyes were on me immediately.

The struggle to keep calm and speak quietly made my voice sound strange and hard, even to myself. Yet I tried to speak gaily—to tell him what I had heard, as a false thing I did not believe,—knew I should hear him contradict; repeated only for his

amusement, for the sake of hearing that contradiction.

But when he had heard me, he turned back to his fire-gazing silently, with a moody brow.

I urged him to speak. I grew afraid. Then he rose, and turned a stern face upon me. I had never seen him look like that before.

"Wife!" he began .... I cannot, even now, write the words he said. They sounded cruel, but were only truth. He did not answer my charge against him—did not notice it; he only reminded me of what I had made his home. His words smote me, how heavily! I threw myself down before him, I clasped his knees. I laid my head upon his feet.

"I cannot bear it to-night. Perhaps I have been harsh. I cannot be patient longer," he said. Gently but firmly he put me by, and then he went away.

I lay where he left me for some minutes,

half-stunned. But I heard his voice, and the noise of horses' hoofs ringing loud and clear on the frost-bound road.

I was at the window, and had opened the curtains and shutters just in time to see my husband riding away. Whither?

I did not go to bed that night. I lay on the ground by the window, where I had thrown myself, not unconscious for a minute. I remember what I thought about as I lay: how I should destroy myself. But my energy was deadened, my brain numb; and I did not rise to seek the means.

I watched the stars, so bright in the bright-blue heaven. I watched them blankly then; now I can recall exactly how they looked, and how they paled before the ghastly dawn.

Ours was always a late household. No one was stirring yet, when there came a heavy trampling of feet on the carriage-drive before the house, and then a knocking at the door, Every sound seemed muffled

to me, for I was half dead with cold and pain.

I rose with difficulty, vaguely wondering, and crept down-stairs. The knocking grew louder, but my hands were almost useless, and trembled long enough at the door.

Long enough! The door was open all too soon.

Without, waited my husband, patiently—ay, very patiently! He waited, but he made no noise.

I know all that followed that dread sight. I cannot write it. One picture you shall have that will be vividly present to me ever.

Harold, my husband—white, cold, blood-stained—laid upon a couch, lying there blind, and deaf, and dumb. His wife as surely—so I thought straightway—his murderess as if she had stabbed him to the heart (God knows she had!), stretched beside him, pushing the defiled, dust-soiled, blood stained hair from his disfigured brow, and pressing there her vain kisses; dyeing

her livid cheek red, laying it against his; putting her hot, live lips to his cold, rigid ones, and crying to him wildly, ceaselessly, "Harold! husband!"

They took me away by force. No one pitied me much. Then I really went mad. God was only too merciful to me—I went mad!

My husband, riding in reckless misery, he knew not where, had been thrown, and dragged along the ground, his dark hair trailing in the dust.

I believe he had been driven out by resentment at an unjust accusation, mingling with despair at the thought that his last chance of peace and quiet at home had fled, now that jealousy had taken form and substance in my mind. I do not believe his heart had ever for a moment wandered from his home; finding no rest on his wife's, it had learnt to love his children with something more than a father's tenderness. He had suffered. Oh! how he had suffered!

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN I was mad, of course they kept my children from me. Dr. Ryton took them to his own house. But their absence retarded my recovery. When once my ceaseless cry to have them back had been heeded, I recovered my reason; slowly, but surely, I grew quieter.

My Aunt Aston had come to nurse me. I owed it to her that I had not been consigned to the tender mercies of an attendant at a madhouse—mercies tender enough for me, in truth! She watched with me, bearing my violence, and, as much as she could, concealing its extent; and she pleaded for me to be allowed to see my children. Dr.

Ryton had loved my husband as a friend; so he had hardly patience to pity me; he left me much to the care of a stranger.

When I could be moved, my aunt took me and my children to a new place. I did not ask or care where. It was by the sea—a wild, lonely, lovely place. I was perfectly sane then, but as weak and as helpless as a child. I did not suffer much, even mentally; for spirit and flesh were alike subdued; my mind was as worn and as much weakened as my body.

Nobody saw me there but my aunt, my children, their nurse, Dr. Ryton, who now visited me, and stayed sometimes unwillingly for days together, as much to watch them as to attend me, and Mr. Morton, the pastor of the district, an aged, most loving-spirited man. In him I saw the beauty of holiness, but I did not feel it. He tried to quicken my spiritual life, to rouse me from my almost idiotic apathy, and to turn a broken spirit upward. My only answer to

him was—"Leave me; let me alone; let me be quiet."

My poor aunt sighed, far more heavily than of old, and shook her head; she thought me drifting into another world, laden with a cargo of unrepented sin that must sink me eternally.

"Shall we not tell her now? Would it not be better?" she asked of the grey-headed old man, who was turning from me disappointed, but unwearied. He shook his head.

"Be patient and hopeful; with our merciful, all-pitying Father nothing is impossible. It is not His time yet."

"But I know it! I know it!" I said to myself, as they left me. "I am dying," and a strange ecstasy thrilled through me.

Every day, through the long months of early and mid Summer, I was carried down close to the sea's edge, and laid there on a mattress in the fierce hot sun. But that sun did not scorch or even warm me; my

heart was nigh dead, and I was always cold.

Dr. Ryton thought me sinking into life-long idiocy, with my frequent moan and ceaseless complaint of cold. But I was living a thought-life, but so faint and so deep down, they could not know it; it was only now and then that I was conscious of it myself.

So I lay there, day by day—following my children with my gaze as they played upon the beach. They did not come very near, they were half-afraid of the still, white figure, with the wild eyes.

"When will papa come home? when will he come and play here with us?" they asked Dr. Ryton one morning.

They were hushed up and taken away, and the words seemed to me to come back out of a strange dream of some far past.

I remember that often I held up my hand feebly between my eyes and the sun, a gesture they did not understand. I

wanted to watch how daily it grew more transparent, for daily I became thinner, paler, more shadowy. The bright sun never burnt my white, sickly skin. For a long time they thought me dying, thought my brain was dead already.

I thank Thee for this most chiefly among Thy tender and numberless mercies, O God; I thank Thee for this most fervently. I did not die,—I lived!

Summer was not yet wearing into Autumn, when my noble boy, my first-born, my young Harold, was taken ill. They did not know that I understood them, when they talked of fever and danger in my presence. It was resurrection-day to me, the day on which I heard them. Yet hardly so, I trust, for it was a resurrection to a knowledge of pain and a dread of death.

Their words sounded thunder-loud in my ears, which lately had received sound very faintly and sense very vaguely. They stunned me only for an instant. I think my gradual

fading away had been half-voluntary, for I was often dimly conscious that I had yet the power within me to rise and live. And now I rose up! It was wet, I think, that day, for I was lying on a couch by a fire; they had spoken and gone away.

I got up; I could stand; I walked from the room. In the passage I met a servant, who started back in affright, and ran to call assistance. But I crawled upstairs and found my way to my child's room, and went in and up to his little bed.

"Let her alone," I heard Dr. Ryton say, as my aunt started forward, and was hastening to me. I thanked him most truly for those words. My boy turned to me with a cry of "Mamma, mamma!" I was very weak, and I sank down on his bed, and his fever-flushed cheek was laid on my cold bosom. They let me stay: my boy fell quietly asleep—the first sleep he had had that had been quiet and refreshing since he was taken ill, they said.

He woke better. I watched him night and day; new life came to me a second time through him. And he loved me so! He would not suffer anyone else to wait on him. And I watched the waning and waxing of the fever night and day. When the danger seemed over, then, suddenly my child grew worse and died. In my brief joy I had not turned to God; in my deep fresh agony I did not turn to Him.

I could not sink back into the oblivion of my death in life. I sat watching by the dead beauty of my once so bold, bright boy; they talked of Heaven, hope, faith, meeting and consolation. I heard, but heeded not at all. My grief was fierce and passionate at first; I laid the child's dead-cold hand on my heart, but it could not freeze nor still it. I was outwardly quiet, lest they should think me mad again; but my heart burned, and night and day my spirit cried:

"Oh, cruel! Cruel and pitiless!" it raved against the Omnipotent; it lashed

itself into futile fury against the Will of the Great, Calm, and Just One.

My little girl they had sent away, but too late. She fell ill, and they brought her home. I would not believe it was the fever; she was always delicate, a little white blossom, and she had pined and fretted for her brother. It was the day that my boy was laid in the ground that my Lily came back to me, and I turned with my great, undiminished, concentrated power of loving to this fragile little form. Perhaps it was my impatient love, my hot kisses, that confirmed the fever-poison in her veins. She woke in the night, the second night after we had buried her brother, burning hot, and talked wildly of papa, of Harold, of Heaven. I called Dr. Ryton, and told him the child was restless, and not, I thought, quite well.

"I expected this," he answered. "Pray Heaven she may recover!"

"It is not the fever," I said, speaking

against knowledge. "It is not the fever; she has caught cold."

"We shall see," he answered.

Oh! how cruel his answer seemed!

"You must save her!" I cried.

"I shall try!" he answered; "but if she dies——"

"Dies! Have you—has God no pity?" I interrupted.

There were many days of hope and fear. Other physicians came, and were commanded, implored, to save her. I prayed for her life wildly on my knees, with all the power I had; but she grew worse.

One night I could no longer bear to watch her sufferings. I rushed out into the open air. It was a fresh, blowing night, and moonlight. I ran along the shore—the waves broke noisily upon the beach. "Alone, alone, alone!"—that was all the wild winds and the wild sea said to comfort me. Turn to Nature for consolation! To "Nature, the mighty and all-pitying mo-

ther!" She flings back your moan in your teeth—she mocks and echoes your cry.

My head was hot, and I felt bewildered. I went to where the waves washed the stones—I knelt down and let one break over my bowed head. Then I rose and shook my wet hair to the cold wind—that refreshed me, and I turned to the house again.

A black shadow fell across my path. Dr. Ryton stood between me and the setting moon. My heart stood still; what tidings?

"She sleeps—you must not go in to her. We think she is saved!" The words were spoken in a cold voice; Dr. Ryton had no sympathy with my grief or joy. The cold words fell on my spirit like heavenly dew, but as yet I dared not hope.

As we entered the garden, I signed to him to go into the house first. I stopped—I fell on my knees—what could I say?

"O God, hast Thou heard my prayer? Is it for my sake Thou sparest this flower?"

So I thought, but I could not pray then.

As I rose again, a shadow flitted before the moon. I thought it had set—the shadow fell so blackly on my face; but when I looked up, I looked straight on, and into her white, serene orb.

Mr. Morton was in the house; he met me at the door, and led me into the room where Dr. Ryton sat.

The two men looked at each other.

"Poor child!" the old man said, leading me to a seat.

"Poor child!" he repeated, looking at me tenderly. His gentle pity calmed me more than aught else could do. With my thin, shaking hands, I began to try and bind up my heavy wet hair, conscious of my wild, disordered look.

"Build up more patience than hope, Mrs. Warden," Dr. Ryton said, and I started, it was so long since anybody had called me by that name. "All is uncertain, even yet; on her waking, your child's life will hang

upon a thread; any agitation will snap it. Everyone about her must be calm and quiet, and she will ask for you."

"You will be very composed and still, will you not?" Mr. Morton asked, "even though she should say things that would naturally shock and startle you—even though," he continued, "she should speak of having seen her father."

"Her father!—yes, she spoke of him the night she was taken ill," I answered, dreamily, and I pressed my hand on my brow, there was such pain there. But I subdued all sign of emotion—indeed, some spell seemed on me that held me tranced. I rose to go away—I meant to go outside my child's door, and listen for her waking. Again Dr. Ryton and Mr. Morton looked at each other; the latter bowed his head. Dr. Ryton spoke, very hesitatingly for him.

"One moment, Mrs. Warden. I have more to say; for your child's sake, be calm. You have never inquired where your hus-

band was buried—have never heard any particulars of his——"

He did not say that last dread word, and yet how loud it sounded to my consciousness—Death. A thrill of agony ran through me.

"Buried!—Harold, my Harold, in the quiet churchyard, in sound of the sea! But no—do not think I am wandering. I know you mean my husband, not my child; both are dead and buried."

They exchanged doubtful glances.

"It must be told now," Dr. Ryton said, firmly. "It is very important," he began, "for your child's sake, that you should learn first from us what she will tell you; for we fear, if it was left for her to tell, that the surprise would overcome you, and that then your agitation——"

"Why do you hesitate?" I exclaimed. "Cannot I bear anything for her sake?—my only remaining treasure. Am I not used to pain and sorrow? But I will not

complain; He is very good if He spares my child, and I shall learn, from her, to thank Him."

"It is not bad news we have to tell you."

"No news can be good to me, save what concerns her. If she lives, I may yet—— But, oh! my husband!"

"It is of him that Dr. Ryton would speak," Mr. Morton said.

"Of him? Spare me!" I exclaimed.

"You saw him brought home, and you remember nothing more, do you, Mrs. Warden?" Dr. Ryton asked.

"Nothing more!" And as I spoke, the terrible sight that ghastly dawn broke upon came back to me, how vividly! "Cruel!" I cried, hastily. "Why do you torture me? But yes, it is right; do not spare me —I did not spare him. Tell me all; I am firm and quiet."

"If God, whose goodness you have doubted, in His infinite mercy——"

"Be gentle," Mr. Morton pleaded. "See." And he pointed to my quivering frame. I could not control that—every word seemed to lacerate my wakened heart.

"Mrs. Warden, God has been infinitely good to you; when you were taken away your husband was not dead."

"Did he live to forgive me?—did he speak of me?" I asked.

I did not at all gather their meaning yet. How should I anticipate such mercy?

"He often spoke of you—he often speaks of you. Your husband lives, but——"

Dr. Ryton was very wise! That "but" —perhaps it prevented my dying of surprise and joy,—and life grew precious.

"He lives, but he does not forgive me!" I said. "I deserve that pain, but it is terrible!"

Dr. Ryton did not answer me, but said,

"There is a slight stir upstairs; your aunt is coming down, and the door is open.

You might go in and watch now; but remember, agitation will kill your little girl. She will tell you that her father has kissed her this very night, and you must not look surprised. Can you trust yourself?"

I bowed my head and rose. My pain had gone; it was all a dream, I thought—a dream in which life and death, and grief and joy, moved confusedly. I stumbled a little way. I thought it had been daybreak, and there came night. I felt about in the black darkness, and could find no way out of it. My strength was over-tasked—it gave way utterly.

Yet I did not find rest, for I did not entirely lose consciousness. The many days that I lay ill I struggled against the darkness round me, and tried with my feeble hands to clear it away from before my eyes. I wanted to think and to understand. I had dreadful dreams or thoughts—I know not which to call them—as I lay, and these haunted me long after. The central idea

was always that of Harold alive, stern and unforgiving. Once I fancied we met in a crowded London street, that I rushed to him and fell down at his feet, that he spurned me.

When the mist clouding my mind at last cleared off—it was, I remember, towards the end of a very serene, beautiful day—I found that they had laid my Lily beside me, that it was her kisses on my cheek that roused me, though I had dreamed that other lips had been pressed there. With an intense longing tenderness, not all for her, I took her gently into my arms. What a joy to know her yet mine! How beautiful and loving she was!

"Papa has been here, mamma; dear papa kissed me!" were the first words she said.

"A dream, my darling," I answered. "Mamma has been dreaming too."

"No, mamma, aunt says it is true. He bent over me, and gave me a long, long

kiss, just as he used of a night at home."

"When was it, my darling?"

"The same morning that I wanted you, and aunt said you could not come. Did he not kiss you, mamma?"

I did not answer, and the little girl's head dropped wearily down upon the pillow.

"Why are you crying, dear mamma?" she asked, soon again lifting up her head to look into my face.

"I am so glad to have you, my darling—so glad you are getting well."

I kissed her, and she soon fell asleep. Not long after, Aunt Aston came up with some tea.

"It is true, then?" I asked. "He has been here? Where is Dr. Ryton? How long is it since I was laid here?"

"Yes, he came, dear. Dr. Ryton went home with him. You have been ill several days."

"Where? Where does he call home, aunt?"

"London. He is gone back to London."

"He is gone, then!"

My heart was very sick and sad, and yet I was very grateful to God. I turned away, and let the tears flow from under my closed lids. I sobbed quietly a long while, and then some new purpose dawned upon me. I would not lie and weep and lament, I would—But I was so weak—what could I do? Trust in God, who was loading me with mercy and kindness, and wait.

"Won't you have your tea, dear?" aunt asked, timidly.

I sat up and took it; then my head felt cool and clear, and I seemed stronger. It was still early in the evening, so I humbly asked aunt to help me dress, I wanted to go down. She said Dr. Ryton would return to-night, I must speak to him and hear all. When I was dressed, I sat down beside my child, and watched her quiet sleep. She was very thin and weak still, but Aunt Aston told me that she was to go out to-

morrow, if it were as still and mild as to-day, and that the doctors said that now she would get over the fever, and might be stronger than she had ever been before.

I asked aunt to go down, and to let me know when Dr. Ryton would see me. When she went, I fell on my knees, with my eyes on my dear little girl's lovely face. I could pray.

I thought of Harold's love as turned from me for ever, so my heart was very sad, and I prayed for patience, but my heart was very resolved too, and I prayed for strength. But I did not feel that I prayed aright. I could not feel that my prayer winged its way to the eternal footstool, and I determined that I would learn how, in what spirit, to pray.

I had a Bible, and went to fetch it. But I heard voices below, so I crept down as hastily as my weak clinging to the bannisters would let me.

Dr. Ryton was not come; it was Mr.

Morton whom I had heard. Aunt Aston went up to put Lily into her own bed when she should wake, and to watch her while she still slept.

The warm evening light was pouring into the room downstairs; it bewildered me somewhat, after the dimness of my own. I looked out silently for a few moments, raising my head up from off the couch where my aunt had put me, trying to collect my thoughts. But the brilliant glow on the cornfield, yellowing now rapidly, and on the still surface of the blue sea, dazzled me.

Mr. Morton came to my side, as I turned round wearily from gazing on the external brightness. The gentle manner of that good old man encouraged me to ask him many questions. He could tell me much, but not all, that I wanted to know. He could tell me about my husband's visit, of his having seen his little girl waking, for a moment, when I left her; and of his having watched

beside her while she slept after I fainted. Had he stood by me too?—had he bent down over me? But no. I knew he had not—I dared not ask that, to hear he had not. He told me, also, that my husband had been to the churchyard, that he had knelt and wept by our boy's grave.

Why had they not told me sooner that my husband lived? I asked.

He had lain very long between life and death, Mr. Morton said. Dr. Ryton had many times utterly despaired of his rallying, and had, at others, hardly dared hope that he would ever recover health of mind and body after the dreadful injuries he had sustained; so he had thought it best to let me believe him already dead. Others about me had often longed to rouse me, by any means, from the apathy lying so heavily upon me, and had wished to tell me the truth; but Dr. Ryton had sternly bade them do so at peril of my life. When my boy's danger did at last rouse me, and when my husband

was first considered to be steadily and surely gaining strength, Dr. Ryton still ordered them not to tell me yet; he thought it right that the discipline of conscious suffering should first do its work. He was not wise there. It was love and mercy that wrought a blessed change.

Where had my husband been? Why had Dr. Ryton ever left him? Who had nursed him? And as I asked that last question, a cry of agony broke from my lips, at the thought that I, his wife, had rendered myself unworthy that office.

Mr. Morton could tell me that Mrs. Ryton had most heedfully nursed my husband, and that Dr. Ryton had only left him because Harold, when conscious, implored him to be here, to watch over his children. He knew that Harold, in those short intervals of consciousness, had talked much of his children, and been painfully solicitous for their welfare, and that even in his delirium he had still spoken of them; but whether, and if at all,

how, my husband mentioned me, he could not tell.

After I had exhausted Mr. Morton's knowledge by my eager questions, I was ready, and very willing, to listen calmly to the old man's wisdom. That evening he spoke to my heart and to my need. I was very weak, and worn, and weary, and had little hope of happiness in this world; and yet I had an infinite mercy for which I desired, and as yet hardly knew how, to thank God. That my husband would ever again take me back to his heart and home, I scarcely hoped; and if I hoped the time might come, it looked so distant that my weak spirit wearied at the dreary desert to be traversed first. But that my husband lived, that I was free from the blood-guiltiness that had lain on my conscience, that my Lily had still a wise and tender father—did not these things demand boundless gratitude?

As, day after day, I sat in spirit very meekly at that good man's feet, the darkness

gradually cleared away. By degrees I learned all the story of his own life—of his loves, and losses, and martyrdom of pain; I learned how his faith had been purified, and his soul sublimed, by patient suffering of the Lord's will.

Then, stilled to reverent attention, I heard the story, and was instructed in the teaching of another life. In my weakness and spiritual ignorance I had somewhat of the simplicity of a child; I listened simply to what was simply told, and all I heard came to me as fresh and strange, and infinitely sweet and consoling. Through the unperplexed medium of the soul of a faithful believer I could look clearly and steadily at the grand idea of the Christian life.

And while I listened and learned, I exercised my newly-striven-after patience. Doctor Ryton did not come, and days passed in which I heard nothing of my husband. During those few quiet, even though somewhat anxious days, I grew familiar with my

future life. I did not harass and perplex myself by effort to discern its features, to depict its joys and sorrows, endeavours and failures, and far-off success; but I tried to realise to my own consciousness the spirit in which I ought to live, and in which, with God's help, I would live.

I often wept during those days. Night and morning my pillow was wet. But they were quiet, penitent, resigned tears, sad and yet sweet and blessed tears.

If wild regret for that dread and sinful past essayed to destroy my new peace, to lash my soul into tumultuous unrest, I knew now how to still the troubled waters; if my spirit failed me sometimes, and my heart quailed and sickened as I imagined what might be the poor forlornness, and the ceaseless longing, and the ever-failing endeavour of my future—yet I could, even then, pray; and having prayed, could look down pityingly on my heart's trouble, and yet control its emotions.

I began to have some dim idea, some, not knowledge, but imagination, of what it would be to be able, in all scenes, trials, dangers, distresses, temptations, and pains of life, to be calm enough to feel that round all our restlessness flows "God's rest!" to be able to merge all hopes, fears, doubts, and dreads, in a perfect, unfailing trust in Him who makes all things work together for good to those who believe in Him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE breath of Autumn seemed to breathe upon, and sanctify as it saddened, the glowing beauty of the land; and nature appeared to sympathise with the sweet, patient soberness and penitence that softened my soul.

It was just the weather for my Lily, too, —mild and still, with no fierce Summer heat; she and I grew stronger together.

We very often sat long in the churchyard by little Harold's grave. It was generally there that Mr. Morton talked with us. In that churchyard lay the dust of all those who had been dearest to him on earth; so the spot was as sacred to him as it grew to be to us.

We went there alone one day—Lily and I. It was rather late in the afternoon. I did not mean to stay long, but it was so very serenely and perfectly lovely there that day.

I sat down, and took Lily on my lap. She was playing with a handful of wild weeds and flowers, and singing, as her custom was, very softly to herself. I had my arms round her, and rested my cheek on her soft hair—it was just as I had held her so long ago. But where was the bright boy, who had leaned against my knee and fixed his large blue eyes so earnestly on my face?

I looked out over the sea, far into the hazy distance, and slow tears dropped down one by one. The sea and the sky were all one colour, a soft greyish blue. On the sea there were no billows, in the sky no clouds; there was no wind to stir wave or cloud, or the black boughs of the large yew under which I sat: there was only a great and

gentle peace—a perfect stillness over all. And was there peace in my heart?

Those slow heavy-falling tears came down one by one, and yet I hardly knew I wept, till, passing my hand over her head, I found my child's hair moist. I was not thinking of the past—I could not bear to do that yet; I was looking forward to an atoning future —a future of active and patient doing and bearing.

Clasping my fair child, I thanked God fervently for His long-suffering kindness—thanked Him most of all for this life that lay before me. Thinking of these things, peace did come to my heart. Resolving to live a life out of self; to live for others, to care for others, and, for myself, only to rest on God's mercy; I began for the first time in my life to know what peace of mind was. O, the blessed hours of that afternoon!

I sat facing the sinking sun; it seemed as if the haziness of the horizon would quench

his beams, and as if he would sink without leaving any light and glory in the west. But the sky brightened afterwards.

The little gate of the churchyard was just behind me.

Lily turned on my lap to peep round my shoulder, when the latch was lifted with a sharp click.

My arms fell from around her—I trembled so, with indefinite expectation. For a moment she was still; then she darted away from me with that old cry, "Papa—papa!"

I had not dared turn—I did not now. I rose, sick and agitated; the golden sunlight bewildered me, and I drew back into the black shadow, and leaned against the old yew-tree. As its large stem interposed between my poor eyes and the setting sun, I thought of the shadow that had passed between me and the sinking moon as I rose from my knees that night in the garden. For the first time I knew that it had been Harold's. He had seen me, then, in sor-

row, endeavouring to pray, and had gone from me without one word! I leaned back very faint. Was this my strength, my patience, my faith?

So near, and yet so far! The pain was very sharp. Would not my poor heart burst? It longed so earnestly, so wildly, for his forgiveness, his kindness, his pity—it dared not hope for his love.

I could see nothing from where I stood, between the old tree and the church wall; but I heard a sound—the churchyard gate shut hastily, and then the noise of retreating footsteps. With Lily in his arms, he had gone away, then! He had come only to see her—there was no thought for me!

I sank down then. I could reach to lay my head on the little mound of my boy's grave; and I thought my heart would beat its last there. If, forgetting my task undone, for a moment I cried, "O, would that I were dead! Thou has forgiven me, oh! Thou infinitely kind Father! for Thou hast

patience with us, remembering that we are but dust!"

After a little, I lifted up my head and rose from the cold earth. I stepped out of the dark shadow into the light of the level sun, and then I knew how near my husband stood.

What could I do? I did not dare look up. I watched how, as he stood, his shadow reached just to the edge of the little grave. I had not long to doubt, or watch. Our little girl was in his arms, he put her down very gently! "Ask mamma to speak to poor papa?" he said. Then I looked up; my sad eyes were gladdened by his old dear smile; I cried out that I could not bear it, and I felt myself clasped fast in his arms.

And was this how we met? Yes, it was more than I could bear. I was weighed upon, burdened, bowed down, and humbled to the dust.

And Harold? It was long before I could look up at his dear face, and then I saw it

changed. On the white brow were scars—thank God, none so ghastly as those of my dream!—and the black hair was thinner, and its blackness dimmed. Round his eyes—but it was not at first I could meet them—were lines of care. All this was my work, and not Time's, and he took me at once into his arms, bent down over me, pitied me for my distress, mourned over my frail looks, whispered kind words of hope and joy, and——but he was good. Oh! Harold, Harold! and I thought you could be stern and cold and unforgiving to your poor sinful wife!

And was my future to be saddened by nothing but my own heart's remembrance of its sin? Was this great love of my husband's mine still? Was there no atonement to be made—no forgiveness to be painfully won—ere it could return to me? It was this that humbled and softened me more than all; the mercy shown me was so infinite.

I soon learnt—though I asked nothing, being so satisfied with what I knew—why I had waited in vain so many days for the tidings that did not come. Harold had risen too hastily from a bed of convalescence, to pay that visit to his dying little girl—to shed those tears over his dead boy; he had been fettered by a promise not to speak to me—told that I still thought him dead, and warned that any sudden shock of surprise might make me a madwoman, or an idiot for life. But he had had too great a struggle with himself to restrain the impulse to rush to me, and take me in his arms, when he saw me kneeling, and so wan and ghastly by the pale light of the moon. The excitement and fatigue had been too much for him; Dr. Ryton had hurried him away, and had kept him a prisoner till the day we met. I do not think there was no shadow over my husband's love for me then; but his tenderness

was greater than ever, and the shadow has passed quite away now.

That evening, in the holy churchyard, kneeling by our boy's grave, we celebrated a second marriage—a second marriage, more sacred, more spiritual, and more happy than the first. I had found my rightful place then, at my husband's feet. Was he not most nobly and grandly good? I had learnt to reverence him, and so found rest on earth. My happiness was ever sobered by memory of the past, and chastened by the looking forward to a future to which the angel-hand of our dead boy pointed; but I was, oh! how happy!

In all this I have expressed but little of my gratitude. My history shows what boundless mercy I had to be grateful for—it is my life that must tell if I am grateful.

You know why I have written this for you. God bless you! I can say no more—

no better. You saw how I shrank from your innocently-put questions about my early married life; but I told you they should be answered, and they are.

It is very many years since I had the foregoing narrative from the writer:

> Beating heart and burning brow,
> They lie very quiet now.

The husband and wife are dead. I need not write this woman's eulogistic epitaph, for "her works live after her"; her memory is held sacred in many a home. I should like stern lips to quiver, and proud eyes to fill with tears, reading her words; it can do no harm, and may do good—so here is that poor Wife's Story.

MY FIRST AND LAST NOVEL.

MY FIRST AND LAST NOVEL.

PART I.

YOU asked me once if I had ever had a secret from my husband.

Answering "Yes," I promised some day to tell you all about it: I will do so now.

When we were first married, and for a time afterwards, we were poor; and neither of us was used to poverty. I was the youngest, and had been the pet of a large family; I was inexperienced in every way, and somewhat spoiled by indulgence. Kenelm, my husband, was several years older than his little wife; he was good, grave, and wise;

there was something in his character that made people afraid of him; when he courted me, my sisters held him in awe; yet, strangely enough, I, coward as I was in most respects, felt nothing of this awe till afterwards, but treated him with girlish audacity and tyranny. I knew my power.

I must not allow myself to tell you of our happiness during the first months after our marriage; that has nothing to do with this story; for then I had not the ghost of a secret from my husband. It is true that I was forced to be very quiet during the earlier part of the day, when the scratching of Kenelm's pen was almost the only sound to be heard in our house; but I indemnified myself in the evening for the morning's silence. I dearly loved to talk to Kenelm! I used then to show him the innermost thoughts of my heart; he was so gentle and reverent, and in return gave me his full confidence, sometimes speaking to me of

things far beyond my comprehension, gladdening me by saying that often a few random words of mine would suggest the solutions of perplexities over which he had long pondered!

Well, we were poor. I had twenty pounds a year; for the rest we depended upon my husband's earnings. We had married in the Spring; the following Winter Kenelm fell ill, very ill. Necessarily his illness increased our expenses; and I, without any regard to cost, or any thought of whose labour must pay for all, procured everything that I fancied might please him or do him good. When he was convalescent, the doctor ordered him not to write for months to come. I understood his smile as he listened to this decree; it smote me with sharp, sudden pain; I remember I ran away to weep.

"I *must* write, my child; we are in debt, we want money." This was all his answer

to my tearful remonstrance, when long, long before he was really well, I saw him settle down to work.

For the first time I shrank away from his mild glance; for the first time the deep tenderness of his tone sounded to me as a reproach.

I went from his study into the garden. It was Spring; but I paid no heed to the loveliness of the sunny morning. To-day I was too miserable to weep, for the first time in my life perhaps. I stood, leaning my head against a tree, absorbed in self-reproachful thought—knowing, for the first time, how dreadful a thing it might be to want money.

I had one friend living near; she had been Kenelm's friend for years and years, but now she was especially mine. It chanced that she passed our gate that morning, and, seeing me, came in for a few moments.

"You, Minnie, of all women in the world, to look upon this sweet day with so sad a

face! What ails you, dear? Kenelm is getting well."

"But he will be ill again. The doctor says he should have change and perfect rest, and—he is at work. I have been extravagant—we want money." She was grave immediately.

"Poor dear!" she said; "no wonder you are not merry—Oh, that money!" She softly stroked my hand, and fell into meditative silence.

Presently she cried, quite abruptly, "Minnie, you shall write a novel!"

I started, and blushed as if she had proposed to me to commit a crime.

"Yes," she repeated, "you shall write a novel. I have a little leisure—nothing else, alas!—at your service. You write, I will revise and manage all besides."

"But—Kenelm—"

"Would he not like it? Ah!—perhaps not—I had forgotten. Good, almost perfect as he is, he has his prejudices."

"But if I could write a book! If I could earn enough money to take him to the sea-side—I would risk the rest. I will not be afraid; I will try and write a novel—only he shall never know unless I succeed."

"Is it well to have a secret from your husband?"

"Just this one. I must try. It would be so glorious if I were to succeed."

"You should know best. But, Minnie, I had rather you told him."

"No, no, no; not unless I succeed. What makes you think that I can write a book?"

"I have seen little attempts of yours—do not blush—and bits, only bits, of your letters to Kenelm. If Mrs. Kenelm Cameron writes her book as simply and fervently as Minnie Grey wrote her love-letters, it will do—always provided that, before she begins it, she quite makes up her mind what it is to be about."

"That is the puzzle."

"It will not long remain so, if the book

is destined to be written. I am going from home; you shall have my address; let me help you in any way I can."

I took leave of her absently, already pondering what my book was to be about.

For three days and three nights I continued to ponder this matter. When Kenelm asked of what I was thinking, I blushed, giving the stupid answer, "Nothing particular." He looked surprised, but said no more.

Now, in all that follows, it may seem to you that if I had given the matter a playful turn, and if my husband had trusted me as he ought to have done, no unhappiness would have ensued. It was not in my power to think of my secret lightly; directly I had a secret from my husband, I turned coward, and became morbidly timid in his presence. And he—he did not suspect me of wrong-doing—it was my want of confidence towards him that he mourned. I think I have heard Kenelm say that it is in the natures

acted upon, not in the acts themselves, that the elements of Tragedy aud Comedy are contained. I suppose we each acted as it was our nature to act.

When those three days and nights of meditation had proved fruitless, I drowned my hope in tears. I had found no subject which I felt competent to treat, no cause to advocate, and I despaired.

A day or two afterwards an acquaintance sent us tickets for a concert; in the evening she called for us. My husband was not well enough to go—I hated to go without him; but he sent me because he thought that I was beginning to pine in a too quiet life. I felt very ungrateful towards the friend who carried me off, so sorely against my will.

It was a "classical" concert of instrumental music. I love such music. Yet by-and-by I found that I was not listening to it. I was writing—nay, rather contemplating—my book! It did not suggest itself to me bit by bit, but I seemed to grasp it all—

plot, purpose, incident—at once. I literally hugged myself under cover of my little white cloak, and said, "This will do."

"Exquisite! is it not?" my companion exclaimed, thinking I had spoken to her in praise of the music. Her glance dwelt wonderingly on my excited face.

Now I was only too anxious to get home. I dreaded that I might forget. Fortunately my friend was sleepy during the drive—and the rapid motion kept up in me the excitement the music had produced. When we stopped at my gate, and the lady woke up to say "Good night," I astonished her by the fervour of my "Thank you! you do not know what you have done for me."

"Are you such an enthusiast?" she asked. "Had I known it, I would have sent you tickets before. I will remember you in future—good night."

I let myself into the house. I had made Kenelm promise not to sit up, and had

ordered Ann to go to bed. How glad I was of this!

The lamp and the fire burned in the parlour, and the little supper-tray stood ready.

I had made no noise; I stole up to my room, found Kenelm asleep, looking very wan and worn; I bent down and kissed him lightly, then ran away.

In the parlour I sat down to write; and I wrote—hour after hour. When the lamp went out, I looked up in consternation—it was growing light.

Very carefully I gathered together my precious sheets; I put them within a book (a cookery book, I remember), and hid that at the bottom of my work-table. I crept to bed cold, tired, and happy, but did not fall asleep till broad daylight.

When I woke, Kenelm stood by my bedside with my breakfast. "Is it late?" I asked, starting up.

"Nearly eleven, love. Did you enjoy the concert, Minnie?"

"The concert—oh yes!" Then as I recalled everything, I felt as if he must find out my secret by looking at me, and I turned away, yawning.

"Not quite awake yet, sleepy one," he commented.

How I was to manage to write in the daytime, was the problem that occupied me while I dressed.

When I was ready, I went to Kenelm in his study. "Must you write to-day?" I asked.

"Yes, I must. Let us dine at four—I will write till then. After dinner we will have a walk. Do not feel over-anxious—I am stronger."

"Can I do nothing for you this morning?"

"Nothing, dear."

He had resumed his pen, and I went away. We had an unfurnished room in our house. I was soon locked in that. I spread my paper on a box—a box that had

gone with us on our wedding journey—and crouched upon the floor to write. I left off just in time to prepare for dinner—to smooth my hair, dip my hot brow in water, and wash the ink-stains off my fingers.

"I wanted you to stitch up my manuscript, Minnie," Kenelm said; "but as I didn't find you in the house, I contrived to do it myself. I suppose you have been working in the garden—too hard, I think; you look flushed."

"My face is rather hot. Now, where shall we walk this evening?" I asked, and began to talk hurriedly of primroses, violets, blue-bells, and the probability of our finding them in the fields around.

That was an exquisite evening. As we wandered about the lanes and meadows, Kenelm sometimes leant on me, I sometimes on him; and I said to myself, "So it should be in life: why should my husband work always, and I sit idle all my days?"

That was very well; but, alas! as I work-

ed, I lost sight of my good motive in the absorbing interest of my work—forgot all my little daily cares for Kenelm while I struggled to achieve a grand good for him.

My husband came home healthily tired. That night he slept soundly, and I could not sleep; so I rose—I could not resist the impulse to continue my work; again it was the daylight that warned me to my bed.

Kenelm told me at breakfast that he must go into town, and should not get home till evening. He had not incurred this fatigue since his illness, and was not fit for it. I did not think of this then; I did not offer to go for him, or beg to go with him; I thought joyfully of the long day before me. He left home at ten, to return at seven.

I told Ann to say that I was engaged if any one should call, and I locked myself into the empty chamber. I uttered a cry of joy as I began my work—I had such a delight in it.

I left off to pretend to dine, but I had no appetite, and soon recommenced writing.

Towards the end of the afternoon I found I could go on no longer. My temples burned, and yet I felt numbed by excessive cold, and my head began to ache intensely.

Kenelm was late; it was getting dusk when he came, and I shunned what little light there was. He was tired, and after tea, lay upon the couch; I sat beside him on a low seat, and rested my aching head on his breast.

By-and-by Ann came in with the lamp, and then Kenelm asked me to read to him. I rose with some difficulty, I felt so weak and weary. Unwittingly I turned my face full to the light as I opened the new book he had brought home, and his eyes were upon me as they generally were,—as I had formerly loved to have them.

"Minnie!" he exclaimed—then started up and came to me. He took my hands

and gazed into my face. This time I was not sorry to feel thick blushes covering my pallor.

Somewhat pettishly I cried — "You startle me, Kenelm!" and I tried to turn away. He would not let me.

"You look wretchedly ill, Minnie. You have been crying much again—so soon! What is it that troubles you? My poor child must tell me!"

"I have nothing to tell you—you are foolish—nothing troubles me!" But he continued to gaze at me so tenderly, so sorrowfully, that I could not bear it. To convince him that nothing was the matter, I burst into tears and sobbed upon his bosom, for he folded me in his arms.

I thought that all was over—that my secret would out, or my heart would break; but he questioned no more, only soothed and caressed me.

Next morning I rejoiced that my secret was still in my keeping.

When I went down into the parlour, Kenelm held a visiting card in his hand, at which he was looking with surprise.

"My friend Ashtower here yesterday, and you did not tell me! You asked him to come again, I hope; you are well aware that I have long desired to see him."

I paused at the door with a face expressing blank consternation. "I—did not know," I faltered.

Yes; I was afraid of Kenelm—his eyes perused my face keenly.

"You did not know—it was Ann's fault, then. This is very vexatious." He was about to ring the bell.

"Stay!" I cried; "it was not her fault. I told her, if anybody came, to say I was engaged; of course she did not know that I would have seen your friend! Till this moment I did not know he had been here."

"And why, my dear wife, would you see nobody yesterday?"

"Don't say 'my dear wife' in that horrid

way. I suppose I was not in the humour for company, as you had left me alone!" I took refuge in a kind of naughtiness, pouted, and made an unnecessary noise with the cups and saucers.

My husband did not speak for some time. Then he said, with a measured mildness that I well understood, "I think, Minnie, that you owe me some slight explanation. I trust that your good sense will lead you to offer me such. As I am confident that my wife cannot act in such a way of which she has need to be ashamed, I do not understand her having any mystery."

I had heard people say that sometimes my husband appeared to hide an iron hand beneath a velvet glove. I recalled the saying now, and asked myself indignantly if he meant to make me feel the smooth inflexibility of his character. I was angry with him.

I offered no word of apology, but remained silent. I could not eat; the first

mouthful seemed as if it would choke me. This made me appear all the more sullen.

No wonder that my noble, high-minded husband looked grieved to the heart at such signs of childish perversity.

When, after breakfast, I sought the bare room, and locked myself in, I trembled,—taking home the moral that was evolving, without conscious effort of mine, from the story which I had called "A Wife's Secret."

I felt the possibility of my little troubles deepening and widening terribly. I cried passionately, "I will persevere; but I must finish soon—I cannot bear this long."

I had taken it for granted that Kenelm had work to do; but when I slipped downstairs, just before dinner-time, I saw him lying on our little lawn, a book beside him.

"He is angry," I thought. "This is the first holiday on which he has done without me."

When we met, I could not be gay or

natural; I was constrained in manner, and felt weighed upon and weary.

The few days that followed were miserable. Kenelm tried to resume his usual demeanour, but something was between us, and I was afraid of him. I wrote as much as I could without risk of detection, and forgot my own griefs during those hours.

I told myself that I would not, that I could not, give up, now that I had gone so far. Whenever I felt wavering and despondent, I pictured to myself my triumph. Kenelm's surprise, delight, gratitude—this would pay for all my pain.

There was surely no tedious lingering by the way in my book. I wrote in desperate haste to have finished it.

PART II.

WITH Kenelm's many letters one morning came a letter for me. I received it from him, and blushed as I slipped it into my apron pocket. It was from my friend, in answer to a note I had sent her about my book. By this time I had become morbidly nervous. I was haunted by a vague sense of wrong-doing, and a dread of being driven to tell a direct falsehood. I had had more than one terrible alarm of detection.

After pocketing my letter I carefully avoided looking towards my husband.

"Read this, Minnie," he said presently, putting one of the letters he had received before me.

I obeyed.

"What shall you do, Kenelm? Shall you go?" I asked, when I had finished. It was from one of my husband's brothers, begging his mediation with the stern old father, who had been bitterly offended—how, does not concern my story.

"Shall *we* go, you surely mean, Minnie?"

I drooped my head; my work was nearly completed; it would be dreadful to me to leave it now. We had been so estranged lately, my longings to have done with this and every secret was very great; if I were left alone a day or two, it could be safely completed.

"Perhaps you are right, and I ought to go alone," Kenelm said, after a painful silence.

"I think you should. It is an expensive journey; your father does not like me, and——"

"I had rather my wife had been thus eager that we should *not* separate. You

have prudence on your side, but—you are changed, Mary." He rose as he spoke.

"Do not say I am changed! Do not speak so: I cannot bear it!" I spoke passionately. He came to my side, sat down by me, and took my hand.

"If I am to be of any use, I should go to-day—at once," he began. "The last few weeks, Minnie, something has divided us. Shall we not be one again before we part?"

I was silent; I did not raise my eyes. Perhaps in the struggle to appear unmoved, I looked obstinate and cross, for Kenelm's tone changed.

"That letter—remember, Mary, that I do not stoop to suspect you of wrong; it is simply your want of confidence that I deplore."

"Suspect me of wrong, indeed!" I cried, again taking refuge in that petulant unreasonableness which baffles men sorely. "It is you, Kenelm, who have no confidence in

me! You treat your wife as if she were a mere child."

"If the time is gone by when she loved to be so treated—when she made me her conscience and hid nothing from me—I must painfully learn how this changed wife desires that I should treat her."

He left the room; when he was gone I wept. But I was a little angry; or, when passing his study-door on my way up-stairs to pack his clothes, I saw him seated at his study-table with his head bowed upon his hands, I could not have resisted the temptation to go to him and confess everything.

It was only by looking back afterwards that I could understand how much change he found in me—how many signs he saw that my thoughts were not all, or even chiefly, his—besides reading that in my often abstracted face. Many of my little duties were neglected, or performed by Ann; many minute cares for Kenelm omitted during those feverish weeks.

As I packed my husband's clothes, I shed some tears over them. When he was actually gone, after a most painfully calm leave-taking, I felt utterly miserable; I spent the day between crying and sleeping, and only thought of my book with disgust and loathing.

Next morning brought me a cordial—a few kind lines from Kenelm, written the night before, from the resting-place which was half-way towards his journey's end.

Having further stimulated my courage by re-perusing my friend's note, which told me of the favourable arrangements she hoped to make for the publication of my book,—I set to work.

The misery of my heroine was approaching its climax; I was one with her—shaken by her fears, torn by her passions, transported by her hope.

Highly-wrought excitement kept me up. While Kenelm was away, I did not go be-

yond the garden; I could not eat, and I hardly slept.

One night,—I had heard Ann go to bed long before, and there was no sound or stir in the silent house,—my self-possession, my sense of my own identity, altogether failed me.

I crouched upon the bare floor in the bare room. I struggled to separate myself from the woes into which I had plunged "the wife" of my imagination. I could not—intense emotion overpowered me. Sick with anguish, I cried out, "Husband, husband! Good God! this is more than I can bear!"

I covered my face; that cry had startled me back to myself, and great terror came over me; I had always been timid of night and darkness.

As I continued to crouch there, covering my face, it seemed to me that something stirred in the room, that chill breath fanned

my neck and arms. I raised my head, seeking light.

My candle had burned out; I was alone in darkness—the thick darkness of a close-shuttered room. I strained my eyes into it; I seemed chained to the spot.

Suddenly my excited fancy made my husband present to me, standing in the middle of the room, regarding me. He was pale; his expression was reproachful, his form spectral.

I spread out my arms towards him; my senses failed me, my last consciousness being of a blow and a flash of pain.

Daylight was streaming through all cracks and crevices when I recovered. I found myself lying with my face upon the floor. I sat up with difficulty, and turned sick and dizzy when I saw a pool of blood close to where my face had lain. By-and-by I managed to get to my bedroom, and, after washing my stained brow, discovered a small but deep wound on my temple. I had

fallen against a sharp iron-bound corner of the box which I had used as a desk.

I did not distinctly recall what frightened me. I felt terribly weak, and lay on my bed quite still for several hours. Then I rang and ordered Ann to bring me some coffee into my room. My window was darkened, and she seemed to notice nothing particular in my appearance. I told her I was not very well, and did not wish to be disturbed.

The hot, strong coffee revived me wonderfully, and my thoughts returned to my all but finished work.

My book was not to be a Tragedy; it was to end quietly, peacefully, perfectly, as a beautiful Summer-day. I laughed softly over the happiness of this summer-like ending, and the tears rained from my eyes. I sat close to the open widow on that lovely day, in a deliciously subdued and sympathetic mood, and wrote my blissful concluding chapters.

With one brief interruption only, I continued to write till late in the afternoon. I no longer wrote with haste and passion, but, as I remember, with a quiet sense of perfect power.

I had finished. I said "thank God."

My heroine was happy now, and my heart craved for like happiness, clamorously. "Make haste and come home, Kenelm!" I cried.

I went down stairs to hunt for string, wax, and stamps; my book must be immediately sent off.

On my work-table lay a letter from my husband. How long had it lain there unopened? I pressed it to my lips and to my bosom before I read it.

It said he would be home this evening! What happiness! This evening at seven, it said; what time could it be now?

Even as I wondered, our clock struck—seven.

There I stood in my loose, tumbled white

dressing-gown, my hair wildly disordered, my hands stained with ink, and my cheeks with tears. I could not move; it was like a dreadful nightmare dream.

My head began to ache maddeningly. I thought how none of my intended preparations for Kenelm's return were made; and I—was I fit to meet him? I pressed my hand upon my brow; unwittingly I displaced the plaster upon my wound, from which the blood began again to trickle.

I would have given years of life to recall one hour then.

I heard the garden gate. I saw Kenelm come up the path, and still I could not move. The room door opened and admitted my husband.

He paused in sad amazement. His face was like the face I had seen in my vision, which now vividly returned to me. I tried to believe this was a vision too. His form seemed to waver and flicker, and a black gulf opened at my feet.

Both my husband and Ann were standing over me when I regained consciousness; when I raised myself on the couch, Ann disappeared.

"I am so sorry—so grieved," I began; "I did not expect you yet. I had only just read your letter, and——"

"Do not talk now—rest, love. Was this just done?"

"No; I struck my head last night, and——"

"My poor wounded darling!"

I had no need to make excuses. He cared for me to-night instead of I for him, yet he looked very travel-worn and ill. He dressed my wound with tender fingers, and said many tender words. But he looked very sad, and I could not bear to meet his inquiring gaze. I closed my eyes, and felt myself a wretched little hypocrite. I passionately vowed never again to have a secret from Kenelm.

My husband made me go to bed early.

He read to me till he thought I was asleep; then I knew that he prayed by me before he went away. How I longed to clasp him round the neck and tell him all my secret, —but I was afraid and ashamed.

When I heard him go downstairs and shut the parlour-door behind him, I sprang up. My Blue-beard chamber was unlocked; all my papers lay about the floor!

I secured the key, but, as I got into bed again, it fell from my trembling fingers. I regained it. The noise had disturbed Kenelm. I heard him coming, and buried my face in my pillow. As I clasped the key, I renewed my fervent vows never again to have a secret.

Next day I noticed that my husband seemed very, very sad. His mediation had only availed to draw more of his father's anger upon himself—he had been of no service to his brother.

When we had talked over this and some other family matters, silence fell. I felt

afraid of what might come next, for Kenelm's eyes watched me earnestly.

"Minnie, my wife, it is you who want change now," he said presently. "You look ill, and you must be very weak to have been so much disturbed as you were yesterday, merely by my sudden arrival. Would you like to go home for a little while?"

"Oh, Kenelm, so much!" I know that my face kindled brightly; for indeed I longed after them all, and thought that it would be a delicious rest to be at home with him.

"Poor child! I thought you would like it. So you have pined for home, Minnie?"

"You shall not say that. This is my home. I will not go to my father's if you say such things."

"Well, well, do not believe I reproach you, darling; we will part in peace."

"Part?"

"I think it will be as well that you should go soon; for a few weeks I must work

very hard, and shall be even duller company than ever."

"Do you think I will go home alone? Oh, Kenelm, what does this mean?"

"That is what I cannot tell," he said. "But I know that you are neither well nor happy; I know that our poverty has pressed its privations upon you; I know that you pine in our dull life here——"

"What more do you know?" I asked, defiantly.

He answered, with mild, even-toned voice, but absolutely hurting me by the urgent pressure of his gaze,—

"I know that in some sad way—by my own fault, it may be—I have lost my wife's confidence; I also know that this is *not* one of the things I will learn to do without."

"What more, sir?" I demanded, hotly.

"This is all. When you are at home, Minnie, and I am alone again for a little while, we may each be able to find out in

what, and how far, we have erred, and then be able to begin our married life afresh."

He spoke as if such serious danger impended, as if such utter ruin threatened our peace, that I shuddered; but he spoke, too, as if he forgot all the happy, happy months when I had been a devoted and contented wife, and only remembered the last few weeks. This made me angry; it was unjust —he was exaggerating everything!

"I will not go home unless you command me; and I am your wife, whom you have no right to send away. You are cruel and unjust!"

"Am I so? We were not talking of rights; I was planning for your happiness; but indeed I work in the dark. I do not see why you should call me cruel and unjust. Again I repeat, I do not stoop to suspect you of wrong; your having a secret from me, and the obstinacy with which you keep it, is my only ground of displeasure. It may be that my own character is alone to

blame; that I am too stern; but I have hoped that my wife loved me too well to fear me."

"She does! Oh, Kenelm, she does!" I sprang after him as he turned sadly away. But then my looks belied my words; the key of the Blue-beard chamber fell from my dress, and I stopped, the picture of guilty confusion.

He picked it up.

"This is not the first time you have let it fall," he said, as he gave it me.

Then he knew that my last night's sleep had been feigned. It hardened my heart to think how deceitful he must believe me to be, and to remember the innocent, holy motive of all this long concealment.

Kenelm went to his study, as I imagined, shutting himself in there for the morning.

I felt utterly reckless. Unknown to myself, a desire for revenge was beginning to mingle with the other motives that determined me to persevere to the end. I

thought that the lower I now sank in my husband's esteem, the higher should I rise by-and-by when he knew all, when my hour of triumph came.

Once more I locked myself into the empty room. I packed up my manuscript, addressed it to my friend, and wrote a note to accompany it, passionately entreating her to let me hear soon—to do everything quickly. Then I put on my bonnet and shawl, hid my precious roll under my arm, and set off for the post-office.

As I walked hurriedly along beneath the limes in our lane, and then through suburban streets, my thoughts were quite engrossed in planning the disposal of the fairy fortune my book was to bring me. Suddenly I swerved aside and turned a sharp corner; in another moment I should have met my husband, whom I had believed to be safe at home. Had he seen me? I thought not. I had disappeared before the abstraction of his look had cleared to recognition.

I made a little circuit—accomplished my purpose, and turned homewards.

My heart sank when I saw my husband pacing up and down beneath the limes. He had seen me, then, and was now waiting for me. The limes were in full blossom; their scent now always takes me back to that afternoon.

When I met Kenelm's eyes, and noted the expression which repressed excitement had given to lip and nostril, I braced myself up for my last and worst ordeal.

He did not speak. He locked my hand under his arm, taking me into custody. He led me into the house, seated me in a chair in his study, then released my hand, and stood opposite to me. I noticed that the hand he leant upon the table quivered. I was sorry; I feared he would do himself harm; but when I raised my eyes to his, his air of judicial sternness had a strange effect upon my nerves. I laughed uncontrollably. Just think how that laugh must

have broken upon his highly-wrought excitement and grievous distress!

I fancy that any man less noble than my husband would have struck me. There was intense pain and anger in his eyes—still, I laughed my insulting, unnatural laugh. He left me. I chose to believe that he had locked the door; I would not go to ascertain. I ceased laughing, and grew very indignant. I, Kenelm's wife, to be treated like a naughty child! Very bitterly would he repent his injustice! Then, as I loved him, my heart grew tender at the thought of the pain he would feel when my hour of triumph came. For the first time I doubted the possibility of this triumph. I could not rejoice if he suffered. We were one.

I threw myself on the ground, rested my head on Kenelm's footstool, and cried myself to sleep. I suppose I was thoroughly worn out. I must have slept many hours. It was dusk, when the opening of the hall-

door, and my husband's step in the passage, roused me. I heard him enter every room in the house before he came into the study; this, and my not detecting the sound of the turning of a key, staggered me in my belief that I had been locked in. But I would not think that I had been a voluntary prisoner all this while.

My husband could not see me when he entered. He peered about, then hastened to the open window.

"Good God! She has jumped out!" he cried.

"I am here, Kenelm," I said, rising.

"You have been here all the time I have been away?"

"I believe I fell asleep."

"Tea is waiting in the parlour—will you make it?"

I followed him. I noticed upon how haggard a face the lamp shone, but his manner was cold, and forbade all tenderness. He broke a painful silence by saying,

"Mary, I have made arrangements for your going home to-morrow."

An angry refusal to go, rose to my lips. I repressed it, and said nothing.

"Your eldest sister passes through London on her way home from Kent to-morrow; I shall take you to the station to meet her. I have written to her, and to your father. Your health requires change of air."

"It is well you should let me know on what plea you send me away."

"The scene of this afternoon taught me that we cannot live together, feeling as we now do towards each other. I will not risk again feeling towards my wife as I did when you laughed, but now. In your absence I will earnestly try to discover where I have been wrong in my conduct as a husband."

I hardly heeded his words. My foot was beating the floor restlessly. I answered:

"You will be sorry—my day will come—you will repent this harshness."

"Am I harsh, Minnie? Then I shall indeed repent. I strive to be calm and just—only to act for your good."

"Oh, you are very calm; you will be happy without me, quite. But you are most unjust!"

"I repeat again, Mary, that I suspect you of no wrong. Your want of confidence has irritated me. When I am alone, I hope to see clearly how I lost your confidence, and how I can regain it. If you were reasonable, you would own that it is best for us to part for a little while."

"I am very reasonable; it is best," I answered; and I know my eyes shone gleefully, for I had jumped over dismal weeks, and was thinking of our joyful meeting. He left me abruptly.

My heart was ready to break when, next day, I was whirled away from my husband, who stood on the platform gazing after us.

Regardless of all lookers-on, I gave way to a great burst of weeping, hiding my face on my sister's shoulder.

My time at home was chiefly spent in wandering about the garden, orchard, and fields, recalling past courting-days, and dreaming over my coming triumph. They were all very kind to me, petting me as they had been used to do; but I liked best to be much alone, to think uninterruptedly of Kenelm. Several times he came to spend an hour or two with us; he rejoiced at my improved looks, but neither of us said anything of my return.

My friend had written to me in most fervent praise of my book. She was working at it diligently—was to write a preface for it, and had made favourable arrangements for its publication.

Time slipped away rapidly. My husband's visits were the only events of my life, which passed in dull dreaminess. I suppose Nature was avenging herself for the excite-

ment in which I had lived for so long.

At last my book was ready, and I received, through my friend, what I considered a very large sum, as part payment for the work. My family had reason to think me suddenly demented. Home, home, home! I cried. I insisted on departing the very morning on which I received my friend's letter, only promising to give them an explanation of my strange conduct before long. Completely roused from my torpidity now, my longing for Kenelm and home was intense. I would travel alone too; I had planned a meeting of which I could endure no witness.

Leaving my luggage at the station, I walked homewards across well-known fields. But the nearer I approached, the more my courage failed me. It was bright, early afternoon, but there seemed to me something eerie in the wind that swept the sun-steeped fields. If Kenelm should be ill!

I paused at the garden gate. The par-

lour blind was down; I saw no sign of life about the house. I paused longer yet before I could bring myself to open the house door. My heart stood still when I knocked at the door of my husband's study; then it beat again so violently that I lost the sound of his listless "Come in." I waited. A slow, heavy step crossed the room, the door opened, my husband stood before me.

"Minnie!—my darling! Come back to me of her own accord!"

He opened his arms wide. I did not spring to him; I had lost all buoyancy of spirit now—all expectation of rapture. Triumph indeed! In what? In the sorrow-stricken, weighed-down aspect of my husband?

"Yes, Kenelm, I am come back," I answered, soberly. I stood before him, feeling very guilty and ashamed. "You must hear all, now," I continued. "It was for this."

I put a bundle of bank-notes into his hand.

"My child, I do not understand."

He turned them over with a perplexed air. Tearfully and hurriedly I told him all.

When I paused, and in my dreaming had planned that I should be clasped in his arms, and hear his exclamations of delight and gratitude, he still did not seem quite to understand. Presently he dropped the notes and hid his face. I shivered. Where was my beautiful triumph? I had suffered and made him suffer so much—for what? I sank down at his feet; I laid my cheek against them, and said,

"Kenelm, was I very wrong? Cannot you forgive me?"

"Minnie, I shall never forgive myself!" He raised me up, and kissed me many times. "This is the pain of poverty indeed—that for these, or such as these, you should suffer as you have done! My darling, how could you do it?—how could you endure so long?—how could you let me

treat you so sternly? Dearest, these were not worth your pain."

I saw it clearly now; I had burdened him with remorse—overwhelmed him with self-reproach. I, his wife, had irreparably injured him. And when I prayed for forgiveness he only begged me to forgive him. With those notes, for which I had worked and endured, lying at our feet, we made a new marriage-compact of mutual confidence and forbearance.

Ah! but I did earn a holiday for Kenelm. I was very ill after that evening of my "triumph." When I grew better, my husband took me to a beautiful little nook by the sea-side; there we had a sweet long rest from all the weariness of our world.

I do not think that Kenelm understood his little wife's nature the less for having read her book; and, when he had grown accustomed to the marvellous fact of its existence, I even fancied that I sometimes detected just a little lurking pride in his

eyes, and about the corners of his mouth, when people, in our presence, spoke of "A Wife's Secret." At such times I only cared to hide my confusion. Even now, after the lapse of so many, many years, I felt a burning flush upon my face the other day, when I suddenly came upon a heap of newspapers and reviews which Kenelm had accumulated, and in them read the name of my first and last novel.

OUR NEW ORGANIST.

OUR NEW ORGANIST.

THE old man who for upwards of thirty years had been organist of Waldon Cathedral was not forthcoming one Spring morning; being sought for, he was found dead in his bed.

When at Waldon—this was never very long at a time: though not exactly young, I was still in my *Wanderjahre*—I had often officiated for old Jackson; and now, at the bishop's desire, I took upon myself the trouble and responsibility of appointing a new organist.

Waldon—for reasons of my own, I do

not speak of my native town by its right name—is a very behind-the-time, out-of-the-world place. My Gazetteer says that it is "chiefly noted for its cathedral, a magnificent cruciform structure, and its palace, the residence of the lord-bishop of the diocese;" but I do not think that it is "noted" at all. Nevertheless though I have travelled much, I have never seen any building that appeared to me so imposing and so grandly suggestive as Waldon Cathedral; but then I have that familiarity with it which breeds, not contempt, but truest reverence for what is truly admirable. I own a house in the cathedral-yard, in which I was born, in which I hope to die.

For some months after the death of our old organist, I was a reluctant occupant of this house of mine. As Spring gave place to Summer, my impatience to escape from the drowsy heat that settled down on Waldon, was great. The two or three ignorant and self-complacent young men who alone

applied for the vacant situation, received questionably courteous dismissal.

One sultry Midsummer evening, my thoughts turned with especial longing to Norwegian fjelds and fiords. I rose from my organ practice abruptly, and left the cathedral by a small, low side-door, of which I always made use. The bishop was absent. I went to stroll in the palace-grounds, and, remembering that in the morning I had needed a work of reference, which I knew to be among the ancient volumes in the library above the cloisters, I obtained the key of the library from the bishop's housekeeper. Afterwards I sauntered beneath the ancient trees on the close-shaven lawns, the while denouncing the stifling heat, a good time; then I paced the wall above the moat dividing the palace-grounds from the cathedral precincts. Presently I fancied that I heard the tones of the organ. I had left the door ajar, the organ and my music-book open. Rather indignant that anyone

should intrude into my domain, the organ-loft, I left the palace-grounds immediately. As I passed into the cathedral-yard by the heavy arched-way from which an avenue of glorious old limes leads to the principal entrance, I was startled by a full burst of rich harmony; it died away as I reached my little door. Just within it I paused and listened: I was not disappointed; the organ again sounded. Open upon my desk I had left a collection of intricate fugues; these the unknown musician began to play. I detected signs of diffidence, and of ignorance of the resources of the instrument, in the style of the player; but I also detected the presence of feeling, refinement, enthusiasm.

"This man will do," I thought, as I listened. "He needs confidence and practice, but he has genius. Ah! ye Waldonites, ye shall slumber through your services no longer! The power of music shall stir ye!"

Twilight was gathering; fine full chords

melted into silence; the instrument was not touched again. I proceeded to mount the stairs of the organ-loft. It chanced that I still had in my hand the key of the library; unfortunately I dropped it, and the consequent noise, echoing from arch to arch, no doubt alarmed the musician. Having reached the organ, I drew back the curtain, prepared to address the unknown. I found there—no one. Of course the player had descended one stair as I mounted the other. I leaned over the loft, gazed down into the dimness of the vast building, and listened intently for the sound of a footfall. I heard no sound, and was inclined to doubt if human fingers had pressed the keys that night. But there was my book of fugues, not open where I had left it; a spirit musician would hardly make use of letters.

I peremptorily called upon the unknown to come forth, unless he desired to be locked in for the night; only the echoing of my own voice replied to me. I shook up the

clownish boy who had blown the bellows for me, and still slumbered in his niche. He could give me no information; had "drowsed" from the time I left off playing till the playing began again, and had seen "naught nor nobody."

No one was now lingering in the building, I felt convinced; so I departed, locking the door behind me; but I sauntered a long time beneath the limes before I could persuade myself to go home.

Next evening I practised again, playing with revived enthusiasm, perhaps in unconscious emulation of the unknown, who might probably be listening. From time to time I peered between the curtains; I saw no one save an old man hobbling about examining the monuments, and a child or young girl whom I had, as it were, seen without remarking, for several afternoons, occupying a dim corner during the service. Both had disappeared when I next looked.

I left Mozart's Twelfth Service open on

the desk and departed. I took up my station behind a tree, and watched the temptingly open door unflinchingly. I had bidden the boy remain in his niche, ready to blow for any performer. No one passed in at that door, yet by-and-by the playing commenced. It drew me on into the building. The choicest passages of the service were exquisitely played by more assured fingers than those of yesterday; this was evidently familiar music. When daylight entirely failed, the performer began to extemporise, trying the full powers of the instrument, of which I was justly proud. Strains of what seemed to me unearthly sweetness and weird strangeness, rooted me to the spot. Sometimes I gazed into the mysteriously stirred duskness of the building, sometimes fixed my eyes upon a star glimmering above the piney top of one of the solemn phalanx of ancient trees, so unwaveringly still, so perfectly defined against the delicious clear tone of the Summer

night sky. I guarded the only exit; the musician could not escape me, unless indeed—— I did not consider myself to be superstitious, yet I vividly recalled an unexplained mystery of bygone years.

I and my chum of that period lived for some time up among the queer gables of a quaint German town, in the house of a professor of music. I was just then studying musical science. One day I sat at the piano in an inner room, poring over a blotted manuscript score, while my chum smoked and read metaphysics in the outer chamber. My brain was perplexed, and the difficulties at which I stuck seemed insurmountable. In desperation, I ran down to the professor's library, and rummaged among musty tomes for any passages that might throw light upon my perplexity. I found what I needed in a mass of Alessandro Scarlatti's. I mounted the steep stair slowly, reading as I went. Suddenly I heard my instrument struck, and paused, rather surprised. My

chum was ignorant of the simplest rule of my art.

"The old professor," I thought, as I listened to a passage which was a perfect and exquisite illustration of the point which I had needed to have illustrated.

I waited till the music ceased, that I might not lose a note, then rushed upstairs, and burst in upon my hazy friend. He removed his pipe from his lips, and opened his dreamy eyes widely.

"Hollo! I thought you were in the other room," he exclaimed.

"Who *is* there?—the old professor, or—the old——?" My chum rose; we entered the inner room together, and found no one. Everything was as I had left it. Dusky sunshine from the begrimed lattice checkered my music-paper. We looked round, then at each other. My chum shrugged his shoulders. My many eager questions produced this answer: "I don't understand it, any more than I understand this"—tapping

his book with his pipe. "I saw you leave that door"—pointing to that of the outer room: "soon after heard a grand strike-up; thought you had perhaps returned while I dozed;—then saw you appear looking as if you were slightly demented. That's all; don't pretend to explain. If it was a ghost who played, I fear I have been mighty disrespectful, for I cried out, 'Well done, old boy!'"

We knocked about the furniture, rattled, till it threatened to come to pieces under our treatment, a securely fastened-up door, which evidently had not been opened for ages, and which led only to an unsafe wing of the mouldering habitation; but we obtained no clue to the mystery, and again looked blankly each into the other's face. We never did obtain the slightest clue to this mystery. As I leaned in the porch of the cathedral that night, I twisted the incident I have recorded, all ways, striving to account for it in what we call a rational manner. In vain.

Something passed by me, stirring the air, making no noise. I started up, stood erect; the last vibrations of sound were dying out. *What* had passed me? Was I thwarted? Had the musician escaped? I locked the door behind me, locking in the unfortunate boy, and hurried after a something that flitted along, close to the wall of the building. Obliged to leave that shelter, it kept close to the trees in the avenue, and proceeded very rapidly. I ran.

An oil-lamp flared under the arched way; just there I overtook the form I had pursued. Bah! it was only the child I had noticed lingering while I practised. Then my musician was, I flattered myself, safely locked up. But the child must have seen him, as she had lingered ever since the service. The musician must, too, have lingered, no one having passed in since I had kept watch.

When I overtook the young girl, I found she was not quite a child; she paused, and turned upon me a small sickly face. I felt

foolish before the mild questioning of her eyes, and the meek dignity of her manner. I muttered some excuse for frightening her.

"You did not frighten me," she answered.

"You have just left the cathedral—you have heard the playing. Do you know who the musician is? Did anyone pass you as you came away?"

"You were in the porch. I passed you. I have seen no one else."

"No one else! Yet you must have been in the cathedral ever since service, or I should have seen you come in. I want to speak to the person who played. Surely you can help me to find him."

Her eyes fell, and she seemed to me to hold debate within herself. Just then an elderly woman stepped under the arch from the street without; she put the girl's arm under her own, and led her away, scolding her for not having come home earlier.

As I returned to the cathedral my mind misgave me; I reproached myself for having

let the girl escape, feeling convinced that she might have aided to solve the mystery. She had not said she could not help me, but had evidently hesitated. I had now little hope of securing the unknown musician to-night; but I opened the door cautiously, and called the boy. He came whimpering; he had believed himself a prisoner till morning. Regardless of his distress, I demanded if he had seen the organist.

"She give me this" (showing a shilling), "and went away the very minute she'd adone playing."

"*She!*" It flashed upon me.

I had spoken to the musician, then—that slight, plain young girl. She would surely come again—I *would* secure her. That night I had strange dreams of musical mysteries, and of a wonderful child-organist, whose playing made the solemn limes perform a stately minuet in the cathedral-yard.

Next evening I set my trap—the open door and instrument—and watched. She

had not been at the service; I had searched every hiding-place; I watched in vain—in vain for many successive evenings. Yet I felt sure that it was but a question of time and patience—that the attractions of the place would prove irresistible.

I was very observant of the Sunday congregation, and of the few persons who collected to listen to the afternoon services. Once I believed that I saw the wished-for face; but a beflowered bonnet, lifted up determinedly after having been bowed down in drowsiness, interposed. I gave up lingering about in the yard of an evening, and ensconced myself instead behind the screening jasmine at my window. An evening came on which my patience was rewarded. I had left upon the organ desk the *Stabat Mater* of Pergolesi, that Domenichino of music. Well, just after the cathedral bell had tolled seven, a slight figure flitted through the arched way, and passed swiftly up the avenue, then took the path branch-

ing off to the small door; here it hesitated a moment, then disappeared within the building.

I sprang up and clapped my hands, crying, "There is no mercy, no hope of escape for you!" I leaped from my window, and crossed the yard bare-headed; before a note had sounded, I had stealthily ascended the organ loft. I did not mean to show myself at once; I would assure myself that this was my very miracle.

I peered through the curtain; the young girl was eagerly pulling off her gloves—from such slight, childlike hands! She looked at the music before her, discontentedly; evidently she did not know it. She turned the leaves, softly trying one passage and another; her face brightened with intelligence and interest.

The girl-musician was not pretty; till she played, her face wore a dejected expression, and when you did not see her eyes, it was lustreless and insignificant. By instinct she

seemed to select the finest passages of the music before her; and as she proceeded, joy irradiated her mien; scintillations of light shot from beneath the lashes of the absorbed eyes; lines of thought and power appeared on the young brow, and a smile of satisfaction made the mouth very sweet. She had forgotten all but the music. I could have sworn then, that the sickly girl was perfectly beautiful—no mere girl either, but a woman with an angel's face. By-and-by she paused, and covered that face with her hands.

When she removed the hands, and looked up, I stood beside her. She did not start; she rose and stood before me, steadily meeting my eyes, varying expressions gathering into hers; at last she slightly smiled. I had meant to be peremptory, to reprove her for the trouble she had given me, and to *command* her to become our organist. I found myself speaking with the utmost gentleness; there was nothing of pride or

triumph in her smile; it was infinitely sad —a smile of resignation.

"If you wish, this shall always be your place. Nobody but you and myself (I would not abnegate my right) shall touch these keys."

A shy, startled joy came into her face.

"Our organist died in the Spring. We have been without one since; you must fill his place in this cathedral."

"Are you not the organist?"

"No; I only play for love of it, and when no one else is here to do it."

"Are you the bishop, then?"

"No," I laughed. "But I am a friend of his. I appoint you the organist of Waldon Cathedral."

She looked at me, to ascertain if I were mocking her, if I were to be trusted; her face grew very bright, but she shook her head.

"I am too young—I should get fright-

ened. I should not play such music as ought to be played here."

"I am the best judge of that—I will try you. I will call at your home, and arrange with your relations."

"I have not any relations; but I have a friend whom I must consult. I will send her to you with her answer to-morrow."

"Your answer must be 'Yes;' and I will do all in my power to make your duty easy and pleasant. Will you play no more to-night?"

She shook her head; so, as it was getting dusk, I closed the organ.

"Promise me that, in any case, I shall hear you play again," I said.

"Oh! yes, if you wish it."

"You have not asked my name, or where I live."

I gave her my card, having followed her to the door. She paused there, looked back into the building, and then out at the noble limes.

"It would be beautiful to live here always. Good night; you have made me happy; I was afraid you would tell me I might not come here again."

I said "Good night," but followed her still. It looked such a spirit-like little form gliding before me in the twilight, that I felt reluctant to lose sight of it. I hinted as much; but under the arched way she paused to dismiss me. If she were a child in years, she had a woman's impressive, because meek dignity. I was impatient for the morrow.

As I sat at breakfast, a book open before me, but my eyes watching the sunlight slanting on the grotesquely-carved figures and rich tracery of the façade of the cathedral immediately opposite me (sometimes my idle days were almost wholly passed in this intent watching, till I could have believed my life to have passed into the shadow I saw stealing more and more of the building from the open sunlight)—as I sat thus,

Mrs. Iles, my housekeeper, informed me that a "middle-aged female" wished to see me. I desired she should be introduced directly, and recognised the woman who had joined the young musician under the gateway, the night she had tarried in the cathedral so late.

"I've agreed that the young lady shall play; it's pleasure to her, and we are but poor," was the answer to my eager inquiry.

The business part of the matter was soon arranged. Our good bishop caused the organist of Waldon Cathedral to receive a handsome salary, and the woman became eager that the child's duties should begin at once.

"I have yet to learn the young lady's name," I reminded her.

"Alice Hall. She's an orphan. I was a housekeeper in her mother's family. They're all gone, and left Alice nothing; and her father was only a music-teacher. We're but lately come from Jersey, and know no one in this town."

"Miss Hall has friends in Jersey, then?"

"She has no friend in the world but me."

Mrs. Smith—that was her name she told me—turned back from the door to inquire of me if I knew of any small house out of the town and near the cathedral, likely to suit her young lady. I was glad to be able to point out to her a pretty cottage on a slight elevation in a meadow behind the cathedral, which was at that time to let. I despatched Mrs. Iles with Mrs. Smith to look over the Mead cottage, and to introduce the stranger to its landlord.

I had appointed to meet my little friend in the cathedral at eleven—she was punctual to a minute. Her guardian accompanied her, and settled herself with her knitting on a wooden bench just at the foot of the organ-loft stairs.

This morning I was teacher. I showed Miss Hall all the peculiarities of the instrument, and heard her play through some of the last organist's favourite services, telling

her that, by-and-by, when she was at home here, she should play anything she chose.

"It is a misfortune for a musician to have such hands as yours," I remarked.

"I try all I can to stretch them," was answered, apologetically.

I should have liked to take the tiny, supple things into my own, to feel if they had any bone at all. Of course I did no such thing; their accidental contact affected me strangely. I did not yet feel so very certain that our little organist was made of merely ordinary flesh and blood.

I made her pay me for my trifling assistance by playing for me Scarlatti's Requiem. She knew it well, and rendered it exquisitely. Exquisite is the word for her playing; it was so finished and perfect, though not wanting in power and passion.

When her guardian summoned her, several hours had elapsed, yet I was reluctant to let her go. I did not praise her; but she pleased me greatly—she was differ-

ent from any woman I had ever known—in a high degree grateful and intelligent. Already I wondered that I could ever have thought her plain.

For a few days yet, I was to play the services. Each afternoon she sat beside me. One would have thought that I was some great master, and she a simple ignorant, so closely and admiringly she watched me. She had the unconsciousness and modesty of genius in full measure. She always looked pained, as if she thought I mocked her, if I descended from the eminence on which she had placed me, and hinted that my gift was less perfect than hers. She had also, as I soon found, the inexhaustible industry and patience of genius—morning and evening found her practising in the cathedral.

"You have had a thorough musical education," I observed to her one day.

"My father lived for music, and devoted himself to teaching me. It is two years since he died, and I have been starved for

music, and his love, since." There was a thrill of passion in her voice, and the tears started to her eyes. "Here I shall be happy," she added, calmly. "I felt sure of it the first time I entered the cathedral."

"You must have been very young when——"

"When papa died? I was nineteen; now I am twenty-one. I am often taken for a mere child."

"Alice, Alice! It is time to go home," Mrs. Smith cried.

Miss Hall was to officiate first on a Sunday, because I planned it so. On the Saturday evening I found her nervous, tearful, and deadly pale. I repented my tyranny, offered to play for her, that she might, as she had wished, accustom herself to her duty by first playing the afternoon services to a small audience.

"No. You are very kind, but I ought to play to-morrow—it is my duty. Shall you be very vexed if I make some great

mistake?" She looked at me wistfully.

"I will take care that you do not do that."

"Will you be near me?"

"Where I am now—ready to turn the pages."

"That makes it all different," said the child. "I thought you would be down among the people, and that I should be quite alone. I do not mind now."

Her words touched me—my eyes grew moist. "God bless you, dear child!" I murmured as I looked after her retreating form that evening.

Next morning I went early to the cathedral to arrange things as I thought Miss Hall would best like. She, too, came early, looking pale, but quite composed.

I watched her throughout the service. She played perfectly. Yes; she was quite to be relied upon, this child; yet how she loved to rely upon others. When all was over—the cathedral empty, and her beauti-

ful voluntary finished—she lifted her eyes to my face as I bent down, removing her books.

"How good you are to me! I could not have borne it all if you had not been by me!" she said.

"I think you could. I think any way you would have managed to do your duty well. Never mind that, however; it is time you went home to rest."

In the evening, she was no longer pale; her eyes did not seek courage from mine; she had no thought but for her music, and played with intense fervour. I did not tell her how the congregation lingered in the building after the service, how many glances were upturned to the curtained gallery where she sat, nor did I afterwards repeat to her the admiration I heard expressed of her performance. Why not? I hardly knew; certainly not because I feared to make her vain—she was far too pure and simple. I fancy I was jealous that she

should hear from others warmer praise than I had ever conceded, and chose to believe her quite content with my content.

Our new organist continued to practise with untiring diligence. I saw her at least once, often twice each day. Each day she looked brighter and happier—music was healing her of inward sorrow, removing the sad sense of desolation. Truly she had been starved: and she could satisfy her soul with music. As for love—was I as a father to her?

There came an evening when I was allowed to walk home with Mrs. Smith and Miss Hall. Before passing through the arched way out of the cathedral-yard, Alice looked back lovingly:

"Would it be possible for me ever, anywhere, to forget this place," she said musingly. "It seems so holy. I am so happy. It is like a dream. When I die, aunt" (so she called Mrs. Smith), "I should like to be buried very near the cathedral."

"No need to speak to me of such things, Alice; please God, you'll live many a year after I am underground."

"I do not wish to die," she answered.

Pressing her hand, which lay upon my arm, against my heart, I longed to gather her dear self to my bosom—the gifted heavenly-minded child!

That night I was invited to sup at the Mead cottage. I had opportunity of observing the elegant neatness—sign of dainty household ways—which pervaded Alice's home. I perceived how the same refinement that characterised her as an artist, informed the humble details of her daily life. When I went home, many things in the arrangement of my grander house displeased me—there were faults of commission, yet more of omission: evidently, a central somewhat was wanting.

The bishop returned to Waldon. I introduced our young organist to him, and he soon began to make a pet of her;

fruit and flowers from the palace-gardens frequently found their way to the Mead cottage. Everything was satisfactory; there was nothing to detain me in Waldon; still I delayed to start upon my long-planned tour.

Charmed weeks flew by. A cathedral quiet and sacredness was over my whole life. A longer stay than usual in Waldon had often before intolerably irritated me; the ceaseless, silent preaching of the solemn cathedral seeming to tempt me, in some way, to desecrate its holiness; its unvarying, unregarding calm making me doubly conscious of the turbulent passionateness so successfully concealed under my old-fashioned aspect. Now, all was different. My being seemed in harmony with all things lovely, calm, and pure.

I was invited to spend a musical evening at the palace; our young organist was to be there. On her account, the ancient and handsomely inlaid piano, which had long

stood in the mullioned window of the episcopal drawing-room, had given way to a splendid instrument of modern construction. By-the-by, I had for some time seen that the Waldon young ladies were jealous of Miss Hall. They treated her contemptuously; and it was beautiful to see how to their haughty reserve she opposed a perfectly simple and self-respecting humility. After a primitively early tea—the cathedral chimes told five as we sat down to the table—we all strolled among the brilliant flower-beds upon the close-shaven lawns. The good old Bishop kept Alice by his side, because she was friendless—no one else noticing her. I contented myself with looking at her.

Alice had now been three months at Waldon, and by this time I did not doubt her perfect moral and physical loveliness. She certainly altered since she first came; the sickly hue of her skin had changed to a clear, pure pallor; the look of dejection had given place to one of deep-seated content; her large

gray eyes shone lustrous, and seemed to well over with feeling and genius. I was familiar with each subtle charm—each droop and natural wave of her soft, brown hair; the course of each vein meandering beneath the snowy skin on her fair temples; the graceful line of her bending neck; the rarely beautiful outline——But, O Heaven! I must stop myself.

On this evening, Alice was dressed as simply as usual: her gown was of lilac muslin, to the hue of which the evening sunlight gave a lovely bloom. She glided along by the Bishop's side, now and then lifting glad artless glances to his kindly face. Sweet child! she was happy; he loved her. She was always happy with those who loved her.

I had lived in a dream so long, that it was difficult for me to throw off its influence. I did not join myself to any of the groups around me; by-and-by I stood quite alone on a little mound, a screen of shrubs

between me and the strollers. I stood still to watch the sunset light glide up the sculptured cathedral stones—higher and higher, touching face, flower, foliage; up and up till it failed from off the pinnacle.

I heard my own name uttered by a voice close behind me—a voice I knew, a hateful, purring, treacherous voice—then I heard these words:

"She is shockingly affected—a dreadful flirt! It is disgusting to see how she has got on the old Bishop's blind side. I wonder if the chit fancies she might be a Bishop's lady!"

"She flies rather lower than that," said a kindred voice. "She and Mr. —— (never mind my name) go on in a way that is quite shocking—in the cathedral too. Of course, they call it practising—a very pretty kind of practice!"

Of course the tabbies spoke of Alice. My blood tingled.

I pushed through the drooping branches and confronted the creatures.

"A charming time for sweet and charitable discourse, fair ladies!" I remarked; then passed on towards the house.

A pair of soft eyes questioned me wistfully when I entered the drawing-room. They met a new expression in my answering look, perhaps; they drooped, and a rosy flush crept up to the veiling lashes. My cathedral calm was desecrated; her eyes had never before so drooped before mine.

When I went home, I found a letter awaiting me. It summoned me north, to the death-bed of the only relative I had in the world. Alice and I were alike in our friendlessness. I immediately went to the coach-office, to secure a place by the morning mail. Even now there is no railway within many miles of Waldon. I occupied the night in packing, and in selecting music, and writing most minute directions

for the organist. This done, I hesitated. Should I write to Alice anything beyond these instructions?—anything personal—private? I decided that to do so would be to deprive myself of somewhat of my measure of pure delight; I did not wish to lose one glance, blush, smile, or tear. I did not expect that my absence would be a long one. In the hurry of my departure, I forgot to tell Mrs. Iles to send the parcel I had prepared for Miss Hall; but as it was addressed to her, she would surely receive it, I thought.

My relative lingered. Each day might be his last, they said, yet he lingered a month. Then business detained me; then, perhaps owing to my anxiety to return to Waldon, I was attacked by nervous fever—a complaint I had suffered from before.

It was on a grim December night that I at last re-entered Waldon. Leaving my luggage at the coach-office, I proceeded homewards. I was so cramped by cold,

and exhausted by fasting, that I could hardly drag my limbs along, and my brain was in a state of feverish excitement. Alice had been present in most of my sick visions —her face always of deadly pallor and reproachful expression. It haunted me; and as I had re-entered Waldon, vague apprehension stole over me drearily.

Midnight began to strike as I passed through the arched way into the cathedral-yard. The wind became very high, sobbing and soughing about eerily; it parted the clouds, and let through a half-gleam of moonlight, to make luminous the moving, low-hanging mists. At the further end of the lime-avenue, I believed that I descried a human figure. It turned off towards my little door of the cathedral. I tried to overtake it; it vanished, passing in at the low porch. The clanging of the clock had ceased, and I imagined that I detected the sound of the organ. I paused. Yes; low wailing notes deepened to a full gush of

minor harmony; then melancholy cadences sobbed away into silence. Chilled to the heart, conscious of icy fingers among the roots of my hair, I opened that door, which I found fast locked, with the key I always carried. I groped my way into the cathedral, believing nothing so little as that it was earthly music to which I had listened. In the building all was now silent. I crept on, with a tremulous voice calling on Alice's name. My open arms embraced a cold form—my senses left me.

When the ghastly wintry dawn crept down upon me, I found myself lying at the foot of a sculptured female form. "Alice is dead," was my firm conviction. I managed to rise and creep to my house. I did not understand how I came to be in the cathedral. My aspect frightened Mrs. Iles. The first thing my eyes fell upon on entering my room was the packet I had prepared for Alice. "Returned after her death," I inwardly commented. I was too miserable

to be fully conscious of my misery. I brooded stupidly over a newly-kindled fire, while Mrs. Iles bustled in and out, on hospitable thoughts intent.

"When did she die?" I asked, stolidly, by-and-by.

"Nigh a month since, sir."

A long pause.

"Who plays the organ now?"

"Please, sir, take your hot coffee, and get to bed. Time enough to bother about organs when you look less like a corpse," was added, *sotto voce.*

I repeated my question doggedly.

"Well, she does it all the same," was the weird-sounding reply.

I had swallowed one cup of Mrs. Iles' hot, strong coffee, and life was rekindling within me.

"Are you mocking me, woman?" I cried.

She stared at me, and then gave some soothing answer. Evidently she feared I

was deranged. I made a mighty effort to appear composed.

"Mrs. Iles, tell me immediately the name of the person who now plays the cathedral organ."

"Alice Hall, sir; the same who has played for six months now. She went off sudden, and it made no difference to Miss Hall, as it might have done to some, sir; she has not missed a service."

Again my housekeeper appeared to find cause for alarm in my face.

"Do you mean to say that, for the last month, since her death, the cathedral organ has been played as it used to be in her life?"

"Yes, sir—it has, sir."

The woman backed towards the door as I rose.

"Played by a departed—a disembodied spirit, and you take it all as a matter of course!"

"Law!—good gracious! sir, I never said

anything of the kind. Some say Miss Hall looks like a ghost, but she isn't one yet."

"Who, then, died a month since?"

I put the question solemnly.

"Mrs. Smith, sir, who used to live with Miss Hall, went off in a fit, quite sudden, as I told you plainly, sir."

"Leave the room," I commanded.

I cannot say what I did or how I felt when left alone. By-and-by I rang for Mrs. Iles. I explained to her my recent illness, and as much as I could remember of the incidents of the night. Having taken some trouble to convince her of my sanity, I again dismissed her.

Poor, poor Alice!—dear, desolate child! I reproached myself bitterly for having selfishly thought of my own delight, not of her peace; and I tormented myself by imagining what she could think of me—of my having left her without one word of leave-taking, or one sign of remembrance. The

parcel had all the time remained where I had left it!

I went to the cathedral early. I found that Alice was already there. Unseen, I watched her a while. She looked faded and worn, and was dressed in mourning; she had lost her only friend—for I had no right to hope she still considered me as such,—and must feel herself indeed alone. Yet angelic peace and stedfast faith stole over her weary aspect as she played. Oh! well I remember the sweet, upturned face—the droop of the soft hair down the thin cheek! My darling!

By-and-by she paused, and took her hands from the keys to draw her shawl closer, with a pale shudder. I stepped near her. Because I hardly dared speak to her at all, I spoke as if we had parted but yesterday.

"You should not be here on such a morning."

"And you are come home at last?"

She held out to me the hand I had not offered to take. On seeing me she had grown paler than ever; but when I spoke, gladness beamed from her eyes, to be soon quenched in tears, as she saw me look at her mourning-dress. There was a silence of some moments.

"You have missed me?" I asked, humbly.

"Yes, yes."

"And can you ever forgive me?"

"Forgive you!" she echoed.

I held her hand firmly, and over mine came trembling her free hand, thrilling me by its voluntary, undeserved caress.

"You have been ill—I fear you have been very ill," she said, gazing at me compassionately.

I was glad to make the worst of my case.

"I have been very ill. I have much to plead in excuse of my silence and neglect; but not enough, not half enough, if it has given you pain. You tremble. I

frightened you by my sudden return."

"No, no; you never frighten me; you never pain me. I have been sad and lonely; but I knew you would return, if you could—if you ought. You have always been good to me; it would have been wrong of me to think of you unkindly."

"Why did you shudder but now?"

"I remembered a dream, a dreadful dream I had last night."

"Tell it me."

"I had rather not."

"I have a reason for wishing to know it."

"I dreamed that you were dead—that I sat at the organ at midnight and played your requiem."

Again she turned very pale. I think I must have done so too. A queer thrill went through me, as, for the first time, I fully recalled the events of the past night.

"You must let me take you home," I said. I released her hands, and folded her shawl closely round her.

Looking straight into my face with her dear, innocent eyes, she said:

"You must not spoil me so; if you had not spoiled me so, I should not have found it so hard to do without you."

This was just too much for me. I gathered the little thing into my arms, kissed her sweet brow again and again, and cried:

"Alice, you must let me keep you always —you must be my wife!"

She disengaged herself; she drew a little way from me.

"I know that you are very good. Is this because my aunt is dead, and I am alone?" she asked earnestly.

"It is because I love you."

My eyes confirmed my words; hers drooped, and her face looked as if the sun were faintly shining on it through a ruby pane in the window.

The Mead cottage was so desolate that I soon took Alice —— (not Hall) home to my

house in the cathedral-yard. It was on New-year's Day that the good old bishop married us; and ever since my home has been perfectly ordered, and, so she tells me, my perfect wife has been entirely happy.

New-year's Day—the tenth anniversary of my marriage. To-day I have been looking over my papers, and have read through this, written five years since. O Alice, Alice! my wife, my wife! Why could'st thou not visibly tarry with me unto the end?

I never leave Waldon now. No fingers but mine must ever touch those keys hers used lovingly to press. She was to me as a child, wife, all of kin, my only darling! I am having a new organ built, a glorious one; it is to be my gift to Waldon Cathedral, on condition that the old one is taken down five-and-twenty hours after my death, and destroyed; and that during those five-and-twenty hours no mortal fingers touch its keys. I say five-and-twenty hours,

because on the midnight after my death—and I might die just after midnight—Alice will play my requiem, as I heard het so long ago. The organ must never sound again after that. There is a rumour in Waldon that the organist has been mad since his wife's death. I am not mad, because, for my comfort, I know that my love was selfish, my guardianship careless, my tenderness ungentle, my sympathy imperfect, compared with that my darling experiences in Thy keeping, O Lord, my God and her God!

Such is the paper that lately came into our hands. We have learnt that at the cathedral, here called Waldon, the congregation, of about half-a-dozen persons, assembled one grim December afternoon, were detained after service by the powerful beauty of the voluntary performed by their long feeble organist. It came to an abrupt conclusion—the organist was found with his

arms folded on the keys, his cheek rested on them—dead. His wishes with respect to the old organ had long been known: they were strictly regarded.

ANNIE AND HER MASTER.

ANNIE AND HER MASTER.

CHAPTER I.

FRAU VON HEILMANN, mother of Gottfried von Heilmann, musician and composer, a prophet not without honour in his native place of Wüstestadt, knitted as deftly and as constantly as do all the homely and old-fashioned among her countrywomen.

On the morning when we first look in upon her, the easy-chair Frau von Heilmann occupies is placed in its fine-weather position—that is, the estrade in front of the centre window of a handsome and comfortable room on the *bel étage* of a house situated on

the outskirts of a frequented public garden —a "garden" which is no garden, as we English understand the word, but something between a wood and a park—a wood with no sylvan wildness, a park with no lawny slopes or turf expanse; in reality, it is the remnant of an ancient forest, cleared here and there to make place for a statue or a piece of water, and intersected in all directions by carriage-drives and narrower paths, making a sheltered and pleasant enough resort for the idle and the fashionable among the inhabitants of Wüstestadt.

Frau von Heilmann smiled to herself over her knitting, as the Autumn sunshine fell upon her. She was a handsome, snowy-haired old woman, with bushy brows overhanging dark eyes that kept in them much of the fire of youth. She made a striking and pleasant picture, sitting as she did in a sort of indoor bower; ivy festooned the inside of the window, and was trained over the lattice-work which edged two sides of

the estrade; behind her chair was a little thicket formed by her great India-rubber plants, and a few pots of blossoming shrubs and sweet-scented flowers placed at their feet.

Outside, the sky seemed to be blown into a more and more burning blue, and the sunshine into a fiercer brightness, by the keen wind that was merrily, madly whirling about the red and brown leaves it had torn, somewhat untimely, from the trees in the great garden. The light that fell on this indoor picture was wonderfully clear and sharp.

Frau von Heilmann was a little deaf; when the door at the end of the room, on which she had her back turned, opened, she did not look round. Presently she started, for there fell into her lap a heavy drop, which proved to be the first of a perfect shower of bonbons—*chocolate à la crême,* which she loved right well—rained down upon her from a hand above her head.

The shower ceasing, two arms were clasped round her neck, and a soft cheek pressed against hers.

"I was expecting you, Aennchen, Töchterchen," the old lady said. She laid down her knitting, and tried to return the caresses lavished upon her, but she could not get at her assailant. "Come round in front of me, my child. Take care of my plants. Come round where I can see you. You must tell me all about it."

"If you won't look at me, Mütterchen, perhaps I can. Knit, knit, knit!—look only at your needles, like a good, kind Mütterchen, as you are."

Aennchen (or rather Annie, for she was an English girl) carefully pushed her way through the thicket—only her head and arms had penetrated it till now—and knelt down at the old lady's feet. She put the abandoned knitting into the old hands with a little shy, beseeching smile; then, when she heard the familiar and friendly click-

click of the needles, she laid her head down on those motherly knees, and by-and-by began to cry—at first very quietly; and at first, Frau von Heilmann only noticed this crying by now and then, when she came to a point in her knitting at which she had to shift her needles, laying her hand caressingly on the bright brown hair that was scattered over her lap. Generally at the same time—that is to say, in the same pause of her industry—she put one of her pet bon-bons into her mouth, showing that those tears shed upon her knees caused her little uneasiness, not even fear that they might induce a more acute attack of her chronic complaint, rheumatism.

But when five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and the head was not raised, and the sobbing had become violent, Frau von Heilmann laid her knitting and her bon-bons away on the little table that stood at her elbow, and lifted up the girl's face.

A quarter of an hour's hearty crying does

not make a pretty face prettier, though undeniably it makes a plain one plainer. In spite of the temporary disfigurement, however, this face that Frau von Heilmann took between her kind brown hands was a sweet bewitching, loveable little face. In the eyes there was a tender, gentle, and yet wild look—wild in the sense of untamed; the pretty mouth had a passionate but refined fulness; the delicate nostril a sensitive curve; the soft clear skin let every change of mood shine through, betrayed by the flushing and retreating blood.

Holding this face between her strong old hands, Frau von Heilmann tried to read it.

"More tears than enough, Aennchen. What ails thee, my child?"

"Everything, Mütterchen."

"Then I think we shall prove that it is nothing."

"It is one or the other—either everything or nothing. It sounds silly to say so, but

truly, Mütterchen, I hardly know which. Either I am too happy—happier than any girl ever was before, or will be after"—here a sparkling light broke over her face—"or I am miserable, too miserable. There is something here"—clasping both hands tightly over her heart, and drawing a long breath—"that I cannot understand—a heavy weight that I cannot move. Ought not happiness to make the heart light, Mütterchen?—light as a feather, gay as a bird, bright as the sunshine?" Her voice, as she asked this, had a lark-like carol in its tones; but then the tears rushed blindingly into her eyes, and she murmured, "It is not so with me—

"'Meine Ruh' ist hin,
Mein Herz ist schwer;
Ich finde sie nimmer
Und nimmermehr.'

Why do I feel like this, Mütterchen?"

"Ech!" ejaculated Frau von Heilmann, and her hands dropped and folded them-

selves in her lap, while her eyes grew dim and retrospective.

"I think this is how it is," she said, presently. "A great happiness coming to us suddenly, seems more than we can hold; a great blessing falling upon us all at once, seems more than we can bear. We feel burdened, weighed down, till we have found our way to the good God's feet, and asked His blessing upon His gift. When I was a girl, my heart would be light and dance in me because the sun shone, because a bird sang—nay, even for a ball or a ball-dress; but when I was a woman, and Gottfried my husband, my only and ever-beloved, was given to me—and again, when Gottfried, my son, the true and noble heart, was born to me—it was not thus. Is it that your heart is heavy with its *unpraised* happiness, Aennchen, my child?"

The young girl flushed deeply beneath the searching eyes at the solemn question.

"I do not know, my mother." Then,

after a long pause, the truthful tongue said, tremulously, "Suppose, suppose, Mütterchen, that my heart sinks and fails me for fear that I do not love him enough?"

"It can hardly be that you do not love him, child! For 'enough,' leave that to time; you will go on loving him more and more, better and better, through all your life."

"Suppose, then, Mütterchen," and the voice was more tremulous yet, and very low—"suppose that I fear, with fear that makes my heart sicken and shrink till I feel as if I should die, that he does not love me, not more than a very little, not so much as he pities me—that he does not love me enough—not enough to satisfy my greedy heart, so starved for love—not enough to make it for his happiness that I should be his wife."

Frau von Heilmann smiled.

"It cannot be that he does not love you a good deal, Aennchen; or why should he,

who has found his old mother enough till now, want you for a wife? For 'enough' —be good, wise, and loving, Töchterchen; strive to grow more and more worthy."

"But, Mütterchen, I am not good, not wise—I am so childish, so hot, so hasty; and he, your son, is always—no," she smiled and blushed as she corrected herself, "almost always—so calm, so wise, so perfect. Yes," she added, with a vivid and proud kindling of the whole aspect, "he is so perfect—that is the greatest fault I can find with him; and though it is no fault in him, your noble son, it may be a misfortune, even a misery, for poor me."

"Your heart tells you how false that is before your tongue has made an end of saying it," returned Frau von Heilmann. "My Gottfried is not perfect, I know, though I could not easily put my finger upon the speck or flaw. He lives towards perfection, as we all should do, striving towards the fulfilling of the command, 'Darum sollt ihr

vollkommen sein;' but he is not perfect. If he were—we grow towards the standard of what we love, Töchterchen—if we set our hearts high, our lives will not be grovelling. No woman's misery ever came to her through the perfectness, or approach towards it, of him she loved." Frau von Heilmann had noted and rightly understood that proud kindling of the sweet young face. She sealed the pure brow with a kiss, and said—

"Now tell me how it happened, Aennchen. I, his old mother, was quite in the dark. Much as he talks of you—much for a man who talks so little about anything—and always with pity and grave kindness, I did not guess that he loved you."

"And does he? Oh, does he? Is it not a mistake? All pity and grave kindness—only such love as a father feels for a foolish little daughter."

"Last night, when he told me what he had done, I was satisfied that it was otherwise

than that with him. But I, an old woman, cannot make love for a man, Aennchen mein. Ask him—let him speak for himself. I love a love-story as if I were a young girl still, though. Will you not tell me yours?"

For a moment Annie hid her blushing face. Frau von Heilmann could feel how the full heart beat against her knee.

"What can be told at all, is soon told," Annie began when she looked up again: having said which, she paused—long enough to have difficulty in breaking the silence. "You know, Mütterchen, I am not happy at Fräulein Grüppe's. She is very hard and cold, and lately she has been almost cruel. Some of the little ones love the 'English teacher,' or I should not be able to bear it. Yesterday all things seemed bitter and black. Do you know, Mütterchen, that as we took our dull walk by the dismal canal I gazed down upon it longingly; and if I had been alone, and it had not looked so ugly and slimy——"

"Child! Don't let Gottfried hear you talk like that."

"Would he be angry?"

"Hurt—grieved."

"Oh, Mütterchen!" Annie cried. "Suppose it is like that often!—that I often hurt and grieve him! You will come to hate me, and I shall be more miserable than ever, for I shall know I am making you two miserable. I cannot rule my tongue or myself always: I must be free sometimes—have some liberty: this often gets me into trouble at the school. But what a little fool I am! Is it likely I shall talk like that, when I am happy? Already I cannot feel as I did yesterday. It is not like the same world. Yesterday the creeping water, the clinging fog. To-day!—is it the same world, mother?"

"No—not for you, little one." "And she doubts if she loves him enough," said Frau von Heilmann to herself.

"I was wicked yesterday, I know,"

Annie continued, "but it seemed as if there was nothing left to me. It was not bitter to struggle and to bear while there was some one else to keep and care for. I did not complain then, my mother; but just for one's poor self, when one is miserable, you can fancy that sometimes it does not seem worth while to take such pains to keep alive. Well, when I went home from that walk yesterday (it was yesterday, though it seems long ago!) chilled through and through, and very wretched, Fräulein Grüppe met me with a scolding. 'I had kept the girls out too long,' she said: 'Herr von Heilmann was waiting, and his precious time could not be wasted.' Do you know," Annie inserted in laughing parenthesis, "I shall lead a harder life than ever now, when she knows, I fancy. But what shall I care? Oh, I will be so good—so good! Yesterday it was scold, scold, scold—I do not know what she said to me. And then she sent me straight into the music-room to

take my lesson first, that the young ladies might have time to warm their hands. I felt sure Herr von Heilmann had heard all that had passed, and I was ashamed to be scolded like a naughty child in his hearing —afraid he would believe I had deserved it all; but I was obliged to go to my lesson at once. When I went into the room he only bowed to me, just as usual, looking as tall and grand as he always does. He set my chair, arranged my music, standing till I was seated, as he always does." There Annie paused, a little proud and tender smile curving her lips. "I dashed at my music with my eyes full of stinging tears and my hands stiff with cold. I played frightfully, and did not stop myself for the wrong notes, and he did not stop me. Generally he is strict—half a wrong note doesn't escape him. I could not tell what this meant—it frightened me more than a scolding. I stopped suddenly and looked into his face. It had a strange expression ;

the corners of his mouth were twitching, and his eyes were contracted and——"

"Yes, yes—I know the look," nodded the mother. "His father used to look so when he was deeply moved."

"I felt obliged to say something, Mütterchen, for I couldn't bear his silence, so I said, rudely and pettishly, 'You do not think me worthy of correction to-day, mein Herr. Why don't you send me away, and throw my music after me—treat me as Herr Steinwitz treats such pupils?' You see, mother, I was grieved, really, though I wouldn't show it I had hoped to please him that day; it was his own music, and I had studied industriously. How do you think he answered me? He smiled, rather grimly—I know he must have been all on edge with my false playing—and took my hands, saying, 'The little hands are cold, mine are hot, I will warm them, and afterwards my Fräulein will play quite otherwise.' Then he began to chafe

my hands. I did not think anything of that; he had done it for me before, and I had seen him do it for two or three of the quite little children. He always treated me as if I too were quite a child. But that he should be so kind and patient when I had been so rude and naughty—I could not bear that! If he had scolded, I should perhaps have been as hard as iron; but at his goodness I burst out crying, and felt as if my heart were breaking. It is awkward to cry when one has no hand to hide one's face with, nowhere to lean one's head, Mütterchen——"

"Yes, yes," nodded the old mother. "Go on, my child. What happened next?"

"Your son felt my difficulty, I suppose. He did not give me my hands—he held them fast in one of his; but he drew me to him, closer and closer, till my head leant against his breast. Now, Mütterchen, what right had he to know that I should not be very angry?" Annie flashed up a shy smile

into the listening face. "But somehow I did not seem to mind it—it did not seem strange to me to rest there. I did not try to get away; it seemed well with me there, and quite natural. Then, mother mine, while he held me against his heart, and bent his face down upon my head, he said—the words entered my soul without passing through my ears—I cannot tell you what he said. I did not move, I did not speak. I left off crying, and felt as if I had gone to heaven, or heaven had come down upon me. I was no more ashamed than if I had been in my own dead mother's arms. Presently he put me from him, gently, but quickly; he placed my hands upon the keys, and turned the pages of my music. Fräulein Grüppe entered; he had heard her coming. He would not compromise me, for I had not spoken! Mütterchen, I feel I would trust him with all myself, my life, my happiness, my honour. I know he would guard them ten thousand times better

than I could or would myself, and yet——"

"And yet—speak, Aennchen."

The bright proud face clouded, the clear voice lost all its ring of truth and delight, as the girl murmured—

"And yet I cannot feel sure that I love him."

"At your peril let Gottfried hear you say that," the mother remonstrated, with a severe smile. "He is humble in his noble simplicity; he will believe you."

"Would it not perhaps be well for him, my mother, that he should believe that I do not love him?—not in the one way of loving."

The door opened, and Herr von Heilmann came up the room towards the estrade. A tall and stately man, not young, and of a soldierly bearing; naturally fair, but browned to the brown fit for a soldier's cheek. The high brow was a little bald, but the beard and moustache, which did not quite hide a handsome resolute mouth, were

thick, strong, and tawny. The eyes had for habitual expression a look of introspective and concentrated thought; because they did not concern themselves constantly with the common things of that outward world, they passed with some for "dreamy," but their glance could be keen and trenchant. They were the eyes of a wise enthusiast and a long-suffering patriot. The face was deeply lined, seeming to tell of things that had been; the whole aspect was noble and calm; the bearing and manner stiff rather than flexible. No wonder that a young girl like Annie Gresham, looking upon this man, should find it hard to realize that, otherwise than from "pity and grave kindness," a half-chivalrous, half-paternal yearning to take a weak and friendless thing home to his protection, should he desire to make her his wife.

It was this that she did find it hard to realize; this was the real difficulty which grieved and vexed a proud and sensitive young heart.

Annie sprang up from her kneeling attitude when Herr von Heilmann entered the room and stood beside his mother, one hand resting on her chair; her eyes were on the ground, and so she lost the sight that would have gladdened her poor little heart—the warm lighting-up of the grave face when Herr von Heilmann caught sight of her. As she stood there in shy and troubled happiness, she was wondering to herself how he would address her, what sort of notice he would take of her. They had not met since ——and then she blushed overpoweringly, and rather scoffed at her own heart, and said to it, "It is nothing to him; he will call you 'highly-respected Fräulein,' very likely."

Herr von Heilmann was on the estrade now; he bent over his mother, and kissed her hand and her cheek; then, with a face of doubt and inquiry, he turned to Annie.

"She cannot feel sure that she loves you, she says," spoke Frau von Heilmann, rather maliciously. She was a little annoyed that

Annie should have repeated that statement, and meant to sting her to an acknowledgment of its falsehood.

Herr von Heilmann bowed over the hand he had taken in his own, and relinquished it. Annie had not looked into his face while that brief glow overspread it, but she now saw its cold gravity.

"Be seated, Fräulein," he said, setting a chair for her as he spoke. Then he looked at his watch—"I have ten minutes—the time will suffice for my explanation and apology." But he paused, and a shade of embarrassment crossed his brow. "Explain to her, mother," he resumed—"you women understand each other—that though yesterday I was surprised into a departure from my usual respectful attitude, she was quite blameless. I was wrong; my conduct was hasty, ill-considered, for her compromising. While I now offer her my most earnest apology, I wish her to feel assured that in no way will I presume upon her goodness. How

should she know if she can love me? Let her have time to question her heart. I will wait as long as she pleases; till she pleases to have them changed, things shall be between us as they have always been."

"Aennchen!—have you nothing to say, child?" asked the mother, uneasy now at what she had done.

"Nothing, dear Frau," answered poor Annie, who felt as if the bounding life-current were freezing perceptibly within her.

"Gottfried, my son, you are too scrupulous, too punctilious, too formal; you misrepresent yourself, and——"

"Excuse me, my mother. In such a matter a man cannot be too scrupulous. Yesterday I was rash and wrong. Had the Fräulein Grüppe entered one moment sooner, consider in what a position my indiscretion would have placed the dear child here."

As he finished, recalled the scene, and allowed himself to use so tenderly-familiar an epithet, momentary passionateness shone

from his eyes. Annie, had she seen that look, might have followed what would surely have been the bidding of her heart, and, running to him, laid her head again where it had so fearlessly rested yesterday; but she did not see it; she sat still in her place, giving no sign.

The day had changed—cruelly.

"True, true, true!" said the mother, "but Fräulein Grüppe did not enter, and Aennchen forgives you. Is it not so, Aennchen?" She turned upon the girl somewhat impatiently.

"Herr von Heilmann may think me too forgiving if I do," she answered. "Surely if *he* finds so much of which to repent, there must be something for *me* to regret. My conduct yesterday must have appeared to him bold, unmaidenly."

She spoke with a burning blush, and a stinging sense of humiliation.

"Your conduct was admirable—in the purity of childlike simplicity," he answered

—"a simplicity which no man of honour would abuse or presume upon."

Annie hardly heeded his words. She was seized by the impulse to escape, to breathe freely, to be alone. She hurried by, caught up her shawl and bonnet, and discovering all at once that she had exceeded the time of her leave of absence, she declared that she must go immediately.

Throwing her arms round Frau von Heilmann, putting her burning cheek to hers, she kissed her passionately. As she did so, she whispered, "Liebe Frau, you have been a little cruel; but it is best so." Then, with a quick, shy look and a hurried gesture of farewell, she passed von Heilmann, and left the room. As she took her way through the crisped leaves lying thick in the great garden, she felt her heart waiting and listening for a following footstep while her feet hurried her along.

Pausing to look back when she gained the door of her prison-house, she half fancied

she saw the stately figure of Herr von Heilmann in the distance; if so, he had made no effort to overtake her. She might have known that he would not—that what he did not say to her when she was under the protection of his mother's presence, he was not likely to try to say to her in a public walk, and so expose her agitation to the remark of any chance passer-by. She did not think of this; she only recognised that the day was cruelly changed.

CHAPTER II.

HERR VON HEILMANN'S lessons at Fräulein Grüppe's "Educational Institute" were given twice a-week—on Tuesday and Friday. On Wednesday the English teacher had a few hours at her own disposal —to visit friends, if she chanced to have any, or to do any needful shopping. So Annie Gresham's week had three days in it; seeing which, she was surely not much to be pitied, there being lives that seem as if they could know neither days in the week, weeks in the months, nor months in the year. Thank heaven, not many! Thank heaven, it may be that in those few the seeming show is other and worse than the reality. Nature, for most of us, does something to break up

such dread monotony; even to the prisoner in the half-submarine dungeon comes change. The sun strikes the surface of the water, and the wind ruffles it, and there is a greenish and dancing shimmer reflected on the dreary wall; the shadow that stands to him for light changes with the changing hours of the day. Perhaps there has hardly been so cunning-cruel a tyrant, or so dark and deep a dungeon, but that, to every prisoner not doomed to death, has been left some chink or cranny to let in something of the outer life of the world.

We have seen how Annie Gresham had used her Wednesday holiday. With a strange mingling of dread and longing she lived towards the following Friday.

It came; and on it, at the appointed hour, came Herr von Heilmann. It went too, and with it went Herr von Heilmann, and he and Annie had not met.

Fräulein Grüppe so contrived—*how* she contrived was her secret—that Annie had

no lesson that day. Herr von Heilmann left; Annie listened, as well as she could through the throbbing of her heart, to the silence following the last pupil's lesson, to the opening door, the step along the passage, the closing door—and she had not been summoned to the music-room.

When it was too late, Fräulein Grüppe pretended to remember and regret this. On any former day Annie would not have allowed herself to be so forgotten. On any former day she would have frankly put the question that now died on her lips—"Had he not asked for her?" To-day she choked back some bitter tears, and answered nothing to Fräulein Grüppe's apology. All the more she tormented herself with that unspoken question, with others of the kind. If he had not asked for her, why had he not? Was it that he thought she did not choose to come? or did he think that her petulance of the other day deserved the rebuke of his neglect?

The same thing would have happened again; but on the next occasion, when all the lessons but Annie's had been given, and Fräulein Grüppe was about to take leave of Herr von Heilmann, he said,

"Excuse me, madame, but my most promising pupil, Miss Gresham, has not been to me. Is she ill?"

"Dear me, no—only so sadly indifferent. Always out of the way when wanted. Your time is more than up, my good sir; I will not think of detaining you longer."

"I have time for Miss Gresham," was the quiet answer.

Herr von Heilmann shot one of his keenly penetrating glances into Fräulein Grüppe's handsome eyes, and she yielded at once. Reddening, and murmuring something of his too great goodness, she went to fetch Annie. Returning with her, she resumed her former seat and her knitting. Till to-day Annie had always been left alone with her master. Fräulein Grüppe was not re-

sponsible for "the teacher," and "Englishwomen are so coldly cautious, so self-reliant, so competent to take care of themselves." However, something had roused some kind of jealous suspicion in the Fräulein's mind. Had she, on Annie's face that day, seen traces of tears and agitation? She therefore remained on duty—the duty, however, being to herself, not to Annie.

The lesson was only a lesson. Herr von Heilmann was inscrutable, and poor Annie strove to emulate her master's coolness. The lynx-eyed Fräulein discovered nothing; she could not perceive that the master leant over Annie more, or more closely, than over other of his pupils (in fact, it struck her that just the contrary was the case), or that his fingers lingered upon hers when they had occasion to touch them; it was such things as these that the coarse-textured mind of the woman had expected to discover. Had she been a wiser or a purer woman, she might have found cause for the

confirmation of her suspicion that between Annie and her master there was "a something," in the fact that the master treated this pupil with more of distant respect than he observed towards any of the others, though two or three of them were no younger than Annie.

Poor Annie played badly; instinctively she knew that the ends of Herr von Heilmann's moustache were gnawed pitilessly, that his brow contracted with a frequent frown, that it was no use to hope to see the quiet smile, or the pleased twinkle in the sincere eyes, with which he had been wont to praise her. Annie could not bear that he should think her careless of his pained displeasure; so she braved the grim presence of Fräulein Grüppe, which often made her dumb, and said,

"I am very sorry to have played so ill, but I have had hardly any time for study." Which was the truth. He answered no otherwise than by a grave bow, but the

pleasant, kindly light came into his eyes, and as he closed the piano for her, he said,

"My mother much desires to see you; you will make her a visit to-morrow?"

The Fräulein Grüppe interposed—

"I am truly sorry to disappoint the most excellent Frau von Heilmann, but I propose a pleasure for my little friend to-morrow: I require her to take the young ladies to a concert at Scönhaus, at which Herr Steinwitz, whom the Fräulein Gresham admires, will play."

Sudden tears gathered blindingly in Annie's eyes. She did not admire Herr Steinwitz, who was a rival and opponent of her master's; but she did not dare speak, lest her tears should fall then and there: she hurried from the room with hardly a salutation to her master, and no message to her old friend, his mother. No sooner was it too late than she began to fret herself greatly at having been guilty of such ungracious discourtesy.

"Mees Gresham will never do you much credit, I fear, mein Herr," began the Fräulein; "she does not improve: how slightingly and unappreciatively she played that wonderful Andante of yours! She will never do you justice."

"To-day Miss Gresham did not do herself justice," was Herr von Heilmann's somewhat grimly-spoken reply.

"She is so uncertain! In everything I find her so flighty and unequal—sadly unfit for her position, poor thing!"

"Unfit for her position, as you say," Herr von Heilmann returned, rather absently. "You are right, madame; it strikes me so. And if you would, out of the fulness of your womanly charity, make the position a little more fit for her, it might be well; but excuse me, I presume."

"Any suggestions of Herr von Heilmann's on any subject! Is there anything of which Mees Gresham has complained?"

The voice was soft and smooth enough, but the eyes were dangerous, reminding Herr von Heilmann of the impolitic imprudence of interference.

He answered more blandly, not noticing the closing question—"I would suggest, then, some arrangement that should afford Miss Gresham fair time to study for her music lessons. She has a promising enough talent, madame, I assure you, and some love of the art." With those words Herr von Heilmann accomplished his retreat.

There was no attempt after that to defraud Annie of her lessons, or of time to study for them, but Fräulein Grüppe was invariably present. Two, three, four weeks passed without there being a possibility of her seeing Frau von Heilmann. In those weeks Annie grew thinner and paler. Sometimes it seemed to her that Herr von Heilmann himself was not quite as formerly—that a shade of melancholy saddened his serious eyes—that with each lesson he

was more completely than ever only her master.

The setting-in of the " Wüstestadt season " showed Annie more than she had known before of Herr von Heilmann's position. She saw him in public, courted and flattered by all the music-loving beauties of the town and the neighbourhood. He was "well-born "—as his father's son, he was not without a certain prestige, and his own reputation was steadily on the increase: among his pupils were many blond baronesses and fair countesses, whose passion for his art was secondary to their passion for its master, and who in public places appeared to encourage each other to flutter about him, surrounding him with an atmosphere of flattery and fascination.

One evening Annie, hidden, as she thought, in the group of girls of whom she was in charge, watched him thus surrounded, with a sad, proud feeling at her heart of how far off he stood—sad for her-

self, and proud, so proud, for him! The concert had been given for a charitable object—for the benefit of an old and disabled musician. Herr von Heilmann had played grandly: now he stood, cold and courteous, tall and stately, the centre of an admiring group, paying a grave acknowledgment of just homage here, gravely pushing aside foolish flattery there, while his eyes keenly searched the crowded room. Annie did not know how much her eyes were saying when his found them. Steadily, without any show of haste, he made his way through the billowy sea of crinolined beauty to the quiet corner occupied by Fräulein Grüppe's pupils. He spoke to each of them—a word about the violinist who had played, the harpist who was about to play, a brief criticism of the various schools of music represented by the selections of the programme—then, last, he turned to Annie. There was nothing to draw attention upon her—no difference made

that could be perceptible to the world at large, or even to the sharp eyes of the pupils; but there was something which Annie felt—some sunshine of kindness and encouragement, some pleased recognition and acceptance of her unspoken admiration, passed from his eyes into her soul and made tumult there.

But somebody reported or invented something about that meeting which did not please the Fräulein Grüppe. After that evening Annie was not again required to take unassisted charge in public of Fräulein Grüppe's pupils—a charge she had always accepted with reluctance; for among the number were girls of her own age, who, having little womanly modesty or discretion, at times greatly vexed and annoyed her by the levity of their conduct.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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